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CORNELL WOOLRICH: FIRST YOU DREAM, THEN YOU DIE

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FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.

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CORNELL WOOLRICH: FIRST YOU DREAM, THEN YOU DIE

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Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

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For all the living and all the dead
Who helped bring this book to life

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We Are As Flies. . . .

Who of us can claim to know his fate?
I know full well that such is not our choice.
Laughing, always near, in mocking wait,
Lurk lethal, playful gods who mute our voice.
I have shown the random deed that draws
A life away from peace down somber trails,
Making man the dupe of unknown flaws.

In all I've written see how doom prevails.
Read the signs. With hope we wait our hour,
Inherit chaos, and our noblest aim
Shatters, broken by our lack of power,
Held naught by players who ignore their game.

Donald A. Yates

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INTRODUCTION

In 1930, after completing his classic novels *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key*, Dashiell Hammett started a new book. Its title was *The Thin Man* and its protagonist a shadowy San Francisco private detective named John Guild. Near the end of the sixty-five pages of typescript Hammett completed before abandoning the project, there is a tense scene between Guild and a woman in the case. "Aren't you really human?" she cries out in frustration. "Isn't there any way anybody can get to you, get to the real inside you? . . . . Trying to—to really come in contact with you is just like trying to hold a handful of smoke."

Whoever tries to write about the life and world of Cornell Woolrich comes to know precisely what this woman meant.

He was the greatest writer of suspense fiction that ever lived. His two dozen crime novels and the best of his more than two hundred short stories and novelettes strike at us with the same wrenching impact, the same resonances of terror and anguish and loneliness and despair, as one finds in the darkest films of his cinematic counterpart, Alfred Hitchcock. He spent most of his creative life as a recluse, living with his mother in an uptown New York residential hotel. When she died, he cracked, and began his own slow descent to the grave. He had the most wretched life of any American writer since Poe. His funeral was attended by exactly five people. He left no survivors but a rich legacy of fiction. This book is about his life, as much as we can know of it, and about the doom-haunted world he created on the printed page, and about the impact of that world on the nonprint media of movies, radio and television.

No full-scale biography of Woolrich is likely to be written. Too much of his life was spent inside his shell, too much of what he said and wrote about himself was lies. We can penetrate through layers of deception and reach what we think is the truth, but it's just as likely to be a layer of deception that is impenetrable. "I've never lied in all my life," he wrote in his unpublished autobiographical manuscript, "not to anyone else, and not to myself." In fact, he never *stopped* lying. When we try to reconstruct his life we are forced to make educated guesses and to use words like "apparently" and "seems" and "probable" again and again. But the more we explore his fictional nightworld, the more connections we find not only among his novels and stories but between his fiction and his unenviable life, so that writing about his world becomes indistinguishable from writing about him.

I discovered that world in the early 1960s, when Woolrich was still alive in New York and I was a bookish teenager across the Hudson River in New Jersey. In college I wanted to include a discussion of Woolrich in my senior thesis but was advised by my professors in no uncertain terms that he was a mere mystery writer and *eo ipso* unworthy of serious attention. During my three and a half years in Greenwich Village, while I was a student at New York University School of Law, Woolrich was living only a few miles north of me. I never tried to meet him. Perhaps it's just as well that I didn't.

Nine months after I left New York, Woolrich died. A year and a half after his death I was invited by the Chase Manhattan Bank, executor and trustee under his will, to become a consultant to the Woolrich estate. After almost twenty years in that position I am as fascinated and sometimes as infuriated by that man of smoke as ever. I hope to have expressed both emotions in this book.

In a sense, I began writing it the day I began reading Woolrich. Over the years I've had lots of help in trying to understand who he was and what he accomplished. My special thanks to Richard C. Amelung, Gloria Amoury, Michael Avallone, John Ball, Jacques Barzun, Mark T. Bassett, Christian Bauer, D.R. Bensen, Bill Blackbeard, Charles Blackton, Robert E. Briney, Anita Helen Brooks, Syd Cassyd, Claude Chabrol, the late Edward Connor, the late Frederic Dannay, Lou Ellen Davis, Harlan Ellison, the late Pat Erhardt, William K. Everson, Ron Goulart, the late Wallace Hamilton, Foster Hirsch, Edward D. Hoch, Jack D. Irwin, Don B. Kates, Jr., Harold Knott, Marvin Lachman, Burton L. Lilling, Bruce Lilling, Kenneth A. Lohf, James K. Loutzenhiser, Barry N. Malzberg, the late Dan J. Marlowe, Harold Q. Masur, William Nadel, Dan Ostroff, Bill Pronzini, Robert Sampson, the late Hans Stefan Santesson, Charles Shibuk, Edwin M. Singer, Anthony Slide, Ray Stanich, H.N. Swanson, William Thailing, Katherine Thorp, Thomas G. Tolles, Marian Trimble, Jon Tuska, Phyllis White, Tony Williams, the late Lee Wright and Donald A. Yates.

Francis M. Nevins, Jr.
St. Louis, Missouri
October 1987

PART ONE

DREAMS

CHAPTER ONE

In the years just after the American Civil War, when Alexander II Romanov was czar of all the Russias and the economy of the United States was booming, a prematurely white-haired young Jew named Gyorgi (George) Tarler left his native Odessa with his sister Dora and his brother Sigmund, bent on making his fortune. George settled first in Panama and then in Mexico but wound up, like his siblings, in the United States. He went into business for himself in New York City and became a pioneer in the import trade with Mexico and Central America, dealing in real estate as a sideline. Apparently he made a great deal of money rather quickly, and before long he had taken a wife, Sarah V. (Sadie) Cornell, the daughter of a prominent New York family. In view of the prejudices of the time it's unlikely he said much about his Jewish origins.

George and Sarah Tarler had six children before Sarah's relatively early death. One of their two sons, George Cornell Tarler (1876–1945), obtained a Master's Degree from Columbia University in 1897 and an LL.B. from Columbia Law School two years later and then practiced law until 1908, when he entered the U.S. diplomatic corps, serving in Washington, Havana, Bangkok, Rio de Janeiro, Constantinople, Vienna and elsewhere until his retirement and return to law practice in 1922. His career and social position were distinguished enough so that both his marriage in 1927 and his death in 1945 rated respectable coverage in the *New York Times*. His main interest for us is that he was one of Cornell Woolrich's uncles and shared two names with him.

Of the four daughters of George and Sarah Tarler, the one whose life concerns us is Claire Attalie (1874–1957). Little is known of her early life but it could not have been much different from that of any other young lady of New York's moneyed class at the end of the nineteenth century. Immigrant servants were plentiful and cheap. A professional dressmaker came in by the day to make clothes for Claire and her sisters, using a sewing machine whose base was to become the first typing table for her author son. Claire had some musical talent and interests, for during the 1890s she studied piano at the short-lived New York branch of the Scharwenka Conservatory under the school's Polish-German founder, Xaver Scharwenka (1850–1924), one of the best known music teachers of his time. The grand piano on which she played was in the room where, in the early 1920s, her son drafted his first novel.

Soon after the turn of the century, Claire was married. Where she met her husband and what the attraction was between them we do not know. His name was Genaro Hopley-Woolrich (although he may have called himself Howard Woolrich on occasion) and he was either a civil engineer or a metallurgist. He was born in Cheshire, England, in the early 1870s, his ethnic roots Latin and British, his religious roots (but apparently not much more) Roman Catholic. Next to nothing is known of him but he seems to have been a happy-go-lucky adventuring sort, extremely attractive and susceptible to women. If the life of the Woolrich family were a Hollywood biopic of the forties, the ideal actor for the part of Genaro would be Gilbert Roland.

On December 4, 1903, in New York City, Claire gave birth to a son. The baby was given two names from his mother's side of the family and two from his father's: Cornell George Hopley-Woolrich. As the church demanded when a child was born of a mixed marriage, the infant was baptized a Catholic.

Claire and Genaro left New York in 1907 and resettled in Mexico, taking three-year-old Cornell with them. The marriage of these two people from totally different worlds did not long survive the move. When they separated, it was decided that the boy would stay south of the border with his father at least until adolescence. Claire Attalie Woolrich (as she continued to call herself for the rest of her life) returned to New York and the Tarler household.

The breakup of his parents' marriage was obviously traumatic for their young son. As long as he lived, when he talked or wrote about himself at all, which was seldom enough, he avoided or distorted that subject. The way it affected him as a boy is probably captured best in its fictional form, in the first half of his early autobiographical novel *A Young Man's Heart* (1930). By 1936 he had made up a fantasy version of the situation and told it to Martha Foley, one of the cofounders of the prestigious *Story Magazine*, claiming that when he was a boy he and his mother had spent years roaming around in search of his father, who had left them. In the 1960s, describing his life to fellow author Lou Ellen Davis (b.1937), he concocted a different tale altogether. "He told me," Davis said in a 1986 interview, "that he was living in South America with his father and mother, and that his father was panning for gold—that this was what he did for a living—and that his father said there was going to be some kind of a revolution, and that Cornell and his mother needed to get out so they'd be safe. So Cornell and his mother got out of South America, and assumed that the father had been killed, and never heard from the father again." In his autobiographical manuscript, *Blues of a Lifetime*, on which he worked sporadically during the sixties, Woolrich mentions Genaro rarely, and never by name, but claims that when he entered Columbia College in the early 1920s his father paid the tuition from Mexico City. If everyone with whom Woolrich talked about his early life were to come forward and be sworn, we would surely have a different account of his childhood from each witness.

Genaro seems to have spent from five to seven years wandering around Mexico and Central America working on dams and bridges and similar projects with his son in tow. In *Blues of a Lifetime* Woolrich mentions a younger brother of his father's who apparently knew him as a boy and took a liking to him. He also tells us that "from the time that I was a kid and first kept a schoolboyish diary" he had wanted to become a writer. In a letter published in *McClure's Magazine* in 1927 he described himself in his youth as "a blasé critic of bullfights, Mexican earthquakes and Caribbean tornadoes. Where my engineer father went, I went too, and lived in every kind of hotel known to this continent, with only my clothes and a few pet books in my trunk. My acquaintance with schools was very sketchy, but I read a great deal—chiefly Tarkington, Stevenson, Bulwer-Lytton and Victor Hugo. Since I couldn't carry many books around the continent, I read the old ones over and over." Almost a quarter century later, writing about his early life for the reference book *Twentieth Century Authors* (1950), he recalled that his boyhood hobby was collecting the used rifle cartridge shells that littered the grounds outside whatever house he and his father were occupying at the time. "Nearly every second night at dinner the lights would fail, which meant either that Villa had captured the town from Carranza, or Carranza had captured it from Villa. My memory may be faulty, but the turnover was something terrific. From my own personal point of view, the revolution was pure velvet, as every time there was a new 'triumphal entry' the schools would close down for a day or two, until the sporadic shooting had quieted down. I wouldn't have cared if the revolution had never ended." In between these two reminiscences Woolrich fictionalized his childhood memories of Mexican revolutionaries in *A Young Man's Heart* and also in several pulp adventure stories of the thirties.

The relationship between Woolrich and his father must have been intensely painful from the boy's perspective. As an adult, when he mentioned Genaro at all it was usually in connection with a fantasy about his childhood, so that we can't separate the truth in his accounts, if there was any, from the imaginative overlay. "He told me," says Lou Ellen Davis, "that near where they lived in South America there was a bigger kid, and that he paid this bigger kid to let Cornell beat him up where Cornell's father could see it, that he gave him money for this. Cornell wanted to impress his father with the kind of thing that *would* impress his father. And it was very touching, because here was this skinny, frail, very gifted, very artistic kid, and here was this macho guy, and the kid so wanted macho approval." One of the hallmarks of the pulp tales Woolrich was to write in the thirties is an acid contempt for physical cowardice which at bottom, I am convinced, is a contempt for himself.

Woolrich never said or wrote a word about any religious training during his years with Genaro. His father was Catholic by birth, and it's easy to imagine the boy being indoctrinated by Mexican priests of the sort Graham Greene depicted in his 1940 novel *The Power and the Glory*, to visualize the young Woolrich being marked for life by terror before God, fear of death and eternal damnation, revulsion toward sex, just as a soft plump Cockney child named Alfred Hitchcock was being marked for life by British Jesuits at more or less the same time. However, among the scant evidence available there is nothing to indicate that this happened. To the extent that *A Young Man's Heart* can be taken as autobiography it suggests that Genaro was not a religious man at all, and in *Blues of a Lifetime* Woolrich claims that until 1933 he had never set foot inside a church—"Neither for a wedding nor a funeral, a baptism nor a confirmation nor a mass"—and that he didn't know a single formal prayer. Yet as we shall see, religious and at times specifically Catholic phrases, tenets, themes are to be found in abundance throughout his fiction from the beginning of his career as a writer till the end. Where did they come from? How did it happen that two of his most powerful suspense stories, "Dark Melody of Madness" (1935), also known as "Papa Benjamin," and "Graves for the Living" (1937), evoke the pain and horror of being ensnared through no fault of one's own in a sadistic and hideous religion? How did Woolrich come to be haunted all his life by the same terrors and revulsions that priests had instilled in his spiritual brother Hitchcock? This is another of the impenetrable mysteries we encounter in our passage through the Woolrich world.

• • •

During the short unhappy marriage of Claire and Genaro, and several thousand miles from Mexico, the renowned composer Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) was working on an opera which, even though its libretto was based on a pre-existing novel and stage play, is identified with him more closely than anything else he wrote. *Madame Butterfly* dealt with the star-crossed affair between the lovely geisha girl Cio-Cio-San and dashing Lieutenant Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy, who abandons her and their son and later returns to Japan with an American wife, causing the heartbroken Cio-Cio-San to commit hara-kiri. The opera debuted at Milan's Teatro alla Scala on February 17, 1904, two and a half months after Woolrich was born, and had its New York premiere in 1906. According to *Blues of a Lifetime,* Woolrich saw it when he was eight years old. At a time when he and Genaro were living in Mexico City, in a little flat at 6 Calle de Pomona, Grandfather Tarler came down on a visit and took young Cornell to see *Butterfly* as performed by a traveling French company at the Palace of Fine Arts. The magnificent building reminded the boy of pictures he'd seen of the Taj Mahal, and the glass curtain on its stage was said to have been designed by Tiffany, but it was the opera itself that left permanent marks on Woolrich's work. Seeing it at so young an age, he says in his autobiography, "had a strange and lasting effect on me," giving him "a sudden, sharp insight into color and drama that came back to the surface again years later when I became a writer, and was a great help to me." What he doesn't say is that the opera introduced him to the world of tragic love and unhappy endings combined with an intensely visual ambience, that is, to several of the building blocks of his own fictional world. Did the luckless union of Cio-Cio-San and Pinkerton remind him of his own parents? Did he see himself and perhaps get an intimation of his own adult life in the figure of the couple's child, whose name is Trouble? In *Blues of a Lifetime* he never mentions these subjects but concentrates an another form of identification he took away with him from the Palace of Fine Arts: the nationality he shared with Lieutenant Pinkerton. "I walked home on air," he tells us, "my head high, my heart glowing, a secret dream, a secret pride, a secret fulfillment, all in one, now in me, that could never be taken away from me again. Endlessly, mystically, glorying in it: 'I'm an American. I'm one of them. One of those.'" He felt *special.* Apparently he had never felt special before.

Of all his experiences in the years with Genaro, the only one more crucial to Woolrich's future than the encounter with *Madame Butterfly* took place about three years later, probably in 1915. Lou Ellen Davis recalls one version of what happened. "I remember him telling me that he was chasing a girl around a tree—it was a game, he wanted to kiss her—and he said he suddenly looked up—it was night—and he looked at all the stars and he thought: 'Gee, all the stars don't care, nobody cares,' and he ended the game." If that was indeed the way he told it to Davis, he was trivializing perhaps the most important moment of his life, literally his dark night of the soul, when he suddenly understood, not just intellectually but in his heart and blood, that someday like Cio-Cio-San he too would have to die, and that after death there is nothing. It happened, he says in *Blues of a Lifetime,* "one night when I was eleven and, huddling over my own knees, looked up at the low-hanging stars of the Valley of Anahuac, and knew I would surely die finally, or something worse." This, he tells us, was the beginning of "the sense of personal, private doom" that has been with him since that night. "I had that trapped feeling, like some sort of a poor insect that you've put inside a downturned glass, and it tries to climb up the sides, and it can't, and it can't, and it can't." There is no more perfect description of our situation in the world as Woolrich sees it. From that feeling springs almost everything in his fiction that is most distinctive and intense and chilling.

• • •

In early adolescence his painful life below the border with his father came to an end and his life as a New Yorker with his mother and the Tarler side of the family began. In the *McClure's* letter of 1927 he claimed that the year he came to the big city was 1918, "while the war excitement was high," and that he saw his first nightclub, prizefight and ball game that year—at the age of twelve! Even in his twenties he'd begun to shave a few years off his life by pretending he'd been born in 1906. In the same letter he says that "a friend of my father's en route to join the Italian flying corps stopped in New York long enough to take me to Maxim's, Churchill's and the other places of that time. Right then, at the age of twelve, I developed a fondness for late hours. I still think 'Ja-Da' was the greatest song ever written." The tale gains a little in credibility if Woolrich was actually fourteen at the time, especially considering how much older than his years he looked even then.

SEE

For the first ten years or so after his return to the States, Woolrich's home address was 239 West 113th Street, an imposing house near Morningside Park, completed "almost on the nose of the turn of the century" and occupied ever since by Grandfather Tarler and various members of his family. At the time Woolrich moved in, the only other inhabitants besides the grandfather were Woolrich's mother and an aunt. Sarah Cornell Tarler had apparently died many years before, and according to *Blues of a Lifetime* George had subsequently married a fourteen-year-old girl who was with him when the family moved into the house but she too had died before Woorich's return to New York. At the end of his own life Woolrich remembered the house fondly, as an elegant and ornate paradise.

> [I]t had fireplaces in most of the rooms, even the bedrooms, topped by mantels, and in several of them they were flanked by floor-to-ceiling pier-glasses. It had intricate chandeliers in the main rooms, of brass or of prismatic glass, originally used for gas but later transformed for electricity. It even had oval frescoes painted on a couple of the ceilings, portraying cherubs frolicking about with overflowing cornucopias of roses and streamers of ribbons against an azure sky-background. . . .

He remembered Grandfather Tarler no less fondly. "There had always been an inscrutable sort of rapport between us," he writes in *Blues of a Lifetime*, "from the very time I was born. Or at least was old enough to be aware of and to share it. The first grandson, then the only grandson." Which is more than a little misleading since George Tarler did have grandchildren from other children besides Claire. Woolrich drops his cousins down the memory hole in order to portray his relationship with the old man as something special and exclusive, a sort of New York version of the relationship between the teenager and his Gramps in the boy-and-his-dog movies popular in the 1940s. But there can be no doubt that he thought of Grandfather Tarler with affection.

> I can still remember the way he looked, and I always will. He used to remind me a good deal of photographs I'd seen of Mark Twain. Not in facial resemblance so much, but he had that same mane of white hair, worn pompadour. A full head of it, not a hair missing. It had turned white, completely all-over white, when he was twenty-one. And with it a mustache that was just as entirely black, not a white hair in it.

After Genaro, George Tarler was the only man who played a major role in shaping Woolrich's life and world. Even in his own last years Woolrich recalled countless details about his grandfather: that he spoke "four of the main European languages" and loved opera (as we've seen already from the *Madame Butterfly* episode) and kept several glass cases in the house crammed with curios from his travels in Mexico and Asia. But if we are to believe *Blues of a Lifetime*, Tarler was no cultural snob. In the entire house, Woolrich says, there were only a few dozen books, on polished maple shelves above the mantel in one room. His grandfather's orientation was toward the visual arts, and in addition to being an opera buff and curio collector he was one of the first fans of the distinctive visual art of the twentieth century.

> He used to like to have me go to the movies with him, I remember. We'd go on the average of, I don't know, about once a week, I guess. He didn't like to sit there alone, most likely. And it was a help to his walking to have someone along. He was beginning to suffer from hardening, and he had to stop every now and then to let the pain ease off. . . . I'd stand there beside him uncomplaining, unquestioning as a companionable pup, until he'd say "It's better now, let's go on again."

That was the second imprint George Tarler left on his teenager grandson, exposing him on a regular basis to the medium that was to shape the dazzling visual style of Woolrich's finest novels and stories.

The family was not as rich as it had been in Grandfather Tarler's prime, but there were no economic worries. *Blues of a Lifetime* mentions one servant, an Irish cook named Julia who had "been in the house since 1913, when she first came over," and to whom Tarler had literally turned over the whole place for her wedding party, giving her and her guests the run of the house for the evening. Considering the cheapness of immigrant live-in help in the decade of the teens, there were likely other servants as well. Tarler had a special taxi, Woolrich tells us, that he hired by the month with orders to stop at the house and take him to his office each morning, reversing the process at the end of each business day. This was not a household of poverty. Nor was it any more of a religious household than Genaro's had been, and as far as we know neither Woolrich's mother nor his grandfather did anything to challenge his unorthodoxy.

In *Blues of a Lifetime* Woolrich recalled how he "used to scuttle around the corner and get [Grandfather Tarler's] cigarettes for him sometimes when he asked me to. . . . I can still remember the brand. They were Egyptian, Melachrino Number Two, cork-tipped." Most likely it was from Tarler that Woolrich picked up his own smoking habit, which he passed on to literally hundreds of the characters in his fiction.

Woolrich also remembered a period in his teens when he'd shared his grandfather's bedroom. "I can no longer recall what the reason was; maybe they were painting mine. He used to get up and take an ice-cold shower the first thing every morning. . . . He'd snort and he'd bounce around in there, and he'd love it. Then he'd come out with his skin looking as pink and lustrous as a salmon." Except for whatever tie he had with his father this was the only male bonding in

Woolrich's formative years. In the chapter of *Blues of a Lifetime* devoted to this period he evokes the image of Grandfather Tarler again and again, and mentions his mother and aunt almost never.

• • •

The household of four was still intact in 1921 when Woolrich graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School and enrolled for the fall semester as a freshman at Columbia University, just a short walk from 239 West 113th Street. According to *Blues of a Lifetime,* he stayed on at the Tarler house in order to conserve his absent father's resources. Genaro, he says, "had been sending the money to pay for my tuition-fees up from Mexico City, but the conversion into American dollars put a pretty bad crimp into it, and I surmised he wasn't doing too well just then, although he wouldn't admit the fact (at least not to me) . . . ." I suspect that this is a fabrication, that Grandfather Tarler was paying Woolrich's tuition and had chosen Columbia because it was the alma mater of his son George Cornell Tarler the diplomat, but we'll never know for sure. Woolrich concentrated on literature courses, and apparently dreamed of becoming a writer or perhaps a professional dancer. Except in English he was a miserable student.

As he thought back on his time at Columbia from the perspective of forty years later, he saw himself as a "frivolous-minded young character" during college. "Anything superficial and topical that came along, attracted me, and I had to have it." Whether it was the voluminous "Oxford bag" style of trousers that made a man's legs look thick as an elephant's, or yellow rain slickers with slightly risqué one-liners inked all over their backs, or sweaters with "mosaic-like multicolored diamond-shaped patterns" across their fronts, if it was "in," he'd buy it. He also became something of a jazz buff at this time, skipping lunch one or two days every few weeks so that he could spend 85¢ on the latest Red Nichols or George Olsen record. "I had a stack of them," he recalled, "that climbed halfway up one wall of [my] room like a serrated, shellacked chimney-stack, always threatening to topple, somehow always staying up." He smoked "heavily and incessantly" because smoking was fashionable, even though he "actually didn't like the taste of cigarettes." He was beginning to drink sporadically like hundreds of thousands of young men and women during Prohibition, and at one point in *Blues of a Lifetime* he mentions "the white cicatrices" on the lid of the grand piano in the Tarler house "where spilled gin from my pocket-flask had eaten into the ebony patina. . . ." But even though he admits to having been falling-down drunk at least twice, he insists that he "actually didn't like the taste of liquor. . . . It always took the second drink to kill the unattractive taste of the first. And the last drink of all still didn't taste any better than the first had. It was just that by then it didn't have any taste at all." The doom-haunted teenager, tormented by the specter of the valley of Anahuac, had metamorphosed into a Good Time Guy, refusing on principle to take anything seriously, bent only on the pleasure of the passing moment. "How clean and sparklingly fresh and brand-new the world always seemed to me when I first opened my eyes each morning. . . . I was sure each time that it was going to turn out to be a wonderful day ahead and something wonderful was going to happen, and even if it didn't, then it surely would the next day." Woolrich would have us believe that during the twenties, the decade he identified himself with more than any other, he had temporarily put behind him the sense of doom that had been haunting him since his dark night of the soul.

If this is true, if by some miracle he had laid that trapped, marked feeling to rest for a while, the fate of his first love reawakened it.

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There's a brief reference to her in the first chapter of *Blues of a Lifetime*: "I never loved women much, I guess. Only three times, that I'm fully aware of. . . . The first time it was just puppy-love, but it ended disastrously for at least one of us. . . ." In the second chapter he devotes sixty-nine pages to the disaster.

How much of the chapter titled "The Poor Girl" is fiction we can only guess. The writing vibrates with the emotional power he'd built up over forty years as a storyteller and the narrative structure resonates with motifs that will be familiar to readers of his suspense classics. Is he projecting his literary themes back into his life, or did personal experience hand those themes to him on a dark platter? Certainly the chapter is not a straight account of actual events: Grandfather Tarler has dropped out of the picture, and Woolrich implies that he himself had spent his entire childhood and adolescence in New York. On the other hand "The Poor Girl" can't be pure fiction either. His relationship with the first young woman in his life marked his own life and work forever.

It happened, he tells us, in the winter when he was eighteen years old and a freshman at Columbia. That would date the events as taking place in late 1921 and early 1922. But elsewhere in the chapter he says that they occurred in 1922–23! Clearly we can't rely on Woolrich's memory for details. He opens his account by describing a friend named Frank Van Craig, a year or two older than himself, who lived a few doors from the Tarler house and was the son of a retired police detective. "[M]ore than once when I'd stop by for Frankie I used to see him kiss his father respectfully and filially on the forehead before leaving. It touched me oddly, . . . for I had no father, and even if I had had, I couldn't visualize myself kissing him like that; it didn't seem right between two men." Frankie worked in a machine or tool shop but his avocation was amateur boxing, and Woolrich liked to go to the gym with him and watch him work out. "Then when we'd come away afterwards, I used to walk along beside him with a feeling almost akin to adulation, proud to have him for a friend. . . . [H]e had the athletic prowess and the rough-and-readiness of disposition that I would have given anything to have had myself, and that I could already tell was going to be lacking in me for the rest of my life. . . ." If Woolrich is telling the truth, his friendship with Craig was apparently the genesis of his later boxing stories like "Death in Round Three" (1937) and "The Blue Ribbon" (1949). The frustrated desire to be a macho man like his father, or older brother figures like Frank Van Craig, is a theme that haunts Woolrich's self-reflection. Already, he says, he'd been smoking for several months. He loved the name Woolrich but hated Cornell because it didn't lend itself to a manly diminutive like Tom or Jim or Jack, so rather than Corny or the unthinkable Connie he asked other males his age to call him Con.

One evening, Woolrich tells us, he and Frankie were strolling along Eighth Avenue "under the lattice-work of the El" when a very pretty girl approached from the opposite direction and hailed his friend. "She was blonde, with one of those fair, milk-and-roses Irish complexions and hazel eyes lively as spinning pinwheels." Frankie introduces her to Woolrich as Veronica Gaffney but she prefers to be called Vera. Con is instantly smitten. He soon learns that she is "shanty Irish" and lives with her extended family in a flat on the top story of a six-floor tenement building on the corner of 114th Street, "one of an almost unbroken line of them that stretched along both sides of Eighth [Avenue] from the top of the park well up into the Hundred-and-Forties. Its top-floor windows were flush with the quadruple trackbed of the Elevated. . . ." The proximity of the El to tenements of this sort became central to one of Woolrich's finest pulp action stories, "Death in the Air" (1936).

The next evening Woolrich stands in the recessed doorway of a store across the street from the tenement building, waiting for Vera to come out. The love-wait, he calls it. "El-trains would trundle by at intervals with a noise like low-volume thunder and cast strange parallelograms and Grecian key-friezes of light along the upper faces of the shrouded buildings from their windows. . . . A little more often . . . one of the squared-off high-topped autos of the early Twenties would skirt its way gutturally through the enfilading iron girders that supported the structure above." She doesn't appear. The next evening he waits for her again, this time in the rain, which "made the street seem gayer . . . for all these wet surfaces caught the lights more vividly and held them longer, as they went by." She doesn't appear. On the third night, with Frankie to back him up, he actually enters the building and knocks on her door (or rather has Frankie do it for him) and gets to meet her folks. Though he is thin as a stick and nervous as a cat, her good-hearted proletarian parents are impressed since he's the first college boy who ever called on their daughter. With his heart in his throat he asks Vera out for a walk, and without a moment's hesitation she accepts. The instant they're alone on the street, out of sight of the older generation, their rapport breaks through. First they have banana splits at an establishment of the sort which figures centrally in his 1930 story "Soda-Fountain Saga." Then they walk through Morningside Park in the darkness and climb to the upper level where they watch "the spread of the city's lights below and outward from us, until the eye couldn't follow them any more, and lost them in the reaches of the night."

They sit on a bench opposite the little French Catholic church of Notre Dame de Lourdes, whose name Woolrich misremembers as Notre Dame de Lorette. In this perfectly symbolic location they kiss, and when Woolrich tries to go beyond kissing she gently but firmly rebuffs him. "Don't do that. I'll get up from here if you do. And I don't want to . . . I like you, and I like being here with you." She had decided at fourteen, she tells him, not to give herself to any man before marriage. "I wouldn't want to stand up in a church, and know that somewhere some other man was laughing at my husband behind his back. I wouldn't be entitled to wear a bridal veil, it would be a lie before God. . . . No matter how much in love a girl and a fellow are, it doesn't have to be that way." Now Woolrich esteems her even more highly than before, and understands that love, sweet romantic joyous love, is something completely different from loathsome furtive fumbling ephemeral sex. From this encounter, assuming that it's based on fact, springs the legion of unphysical love affairs with which the Woolrich canon abounds. Because she resisted him, Woolrich tells us, Vera Gaffney made "an imperishable print on the memory. She stayed with me ever since." This statement is confirmed over and over, as we shall see, in his fiction.

Their chaste but intense relationship continues for two or three months, into the new year. Then one day, without bothering to consult Woolrich, his mother accepts on his behalf an invitation to attend a birthday party on Riverside Drive for a rich girl whom he despises. Unable to rescind the acceptance gracefully, Woolrich makes the best of a bad lot by inviting Vera to come along as his date. After several days of misgivings about attending a rich people's party, she agrees to go. On the night of the celebration she displays herself to Woolrich in a beautiful new party dress and a glossy honey-brown full-length fur coat. "She was hugging it tight to her, caressing it, luxuriating in it. . . . She even tilted her head and stroked one cheek back and forth against it. . . . She made love to it. . . ." She explains that she got it from a store simply by making a down payment and that she'll return it after the party and get her money back. They take a cab from the tenement building to the house on Riverside Drive. "The lights came at us and went by like shining volley-balls rolling down a bowling-alley, and it was great to be young, and to be sitting next to your girl in a bustling taxi, and to be going to a party with her. It's never so much fun in your whole life afterwards as it is that first time of all." They arrive, and the party spreads itself out before them "like a slowly opening, luminous, yellow-and-ivory fan, alive with moving figures and flecks of disparate color. . . ." The evening is a magnificent success and Vera the cynosure of every eye. She and Woolrich stay till one in the morning, the last guests to leave. The excitement of the party and of her acceptance by girls "of a better class" so arouses Vera that when they return to the tenement and find no one home (the family being out at an Irish wake), Woolrich senses that she wants him to come in with her and deflower her. This time it's he who refuses. "I wanted her this way, the way she was, the way she had been on the bench that night. I had this image of her. I wanted to keep it, I didn't want to take anything away from it." He hastens away from her in a state next to panic.

It's the last time they are together. She doesn't come to their special bench the next day, or the next, or the next. When he knocks fearfully on the door of her flat, her mother glares at him ferociously and begins screaming at him. "Isn't it enough you've done? Well, isn't it? . . . . Stay away from here. There's no Vera here for you." And as the door bangs shut we suddenly understand the roots of the annihilation stories like "All at Once, No Alice" (1940) that form one of Woolrich's unique contributions to the literature of darkness.

Several weeks later, in a casual meeting on the street between Woolrich and Frank Van Craig, the subject of Vera comes up. "All of a sudden I didn't see her any more," Con tells his buddy. "She dropped from sight, and I couldn't find out why." Frank explains what had happened. The police had arrested her for borrowing without permission an expensive fur coat from the rich old lady on West End Avenue for whom she worked part-time, and she is serving six months in an upstate reformatory. "I felt like a dog that's just had its paw stepped on real bad," Woolrich says, "and it goes limping off on three feet and is leery of everyone, doesn't want anyone to come near it for awhile. The only thing I didn't do was whimper like one."

All winter long, whenever he passes the tenement building on the corner of Eighth Avenue and 114th Street, he imagines he sees Vera in the doorway. Recognizing that it's an illusion brings back to him the "sense of isolation, of pinpointed and transfixed helplessness under the stars, of being left alone, unheard and unaided to face some final fated darkness and engulfment slowly advancing across the years toward me," the doom-hauntedness "that has hung over me all my life. . . ."

Then one night in June of 1923, walking along Eighth Avenue, he comes upon an outdoor block party in progress around 114th Street. "[A]s I stood there on the lip of the curbing taking it all in, she was suddenly there in front of me." This time it's no illusion but she looks different, older, used and worn, her face marked by "long, sleepless nights of brooding, of frustration and rebellion." They exchange a few casual words—she says she doesn't live on the block anymore but has just come to visit for old times' sake—and are dancing together in the street when another woman cuts in and brusquely tells Vera that "they" are waiting for her and don't like to be kept waiting. Passively Vera goes off with the second woman. Woolrich sees them enter a high-powered black sedan and catches a glimpse of some mysterious and prosperous-looking older men in the tonneau. The car door cracks shut flatly and the auto glides away. "[L]ike a great big inky patch against the paler night it grew smaller and smaller as it dwindled down the street, stealthily, without sound, until it had contracted into extinction and was there no more." If we've read Woolrich's fiction we'll remember the women like Bernice in *Manhattan Love Song* (1932) who are under the control of nameless powers in the city, and the silently gliding black sedan at the opening of one of his most powerful tales set in the twenties, "The Number's Up" (1959), and we'll know where these elements came from. The chapter ends with one of the most perfect paragraphs in *noir* literature. "We never saw each other again, in this world, in this lifetime. Or if we did, we didn't know each other."

Did he really expect us to believe that in the early 1920s he was a frivolous Good Time Guy?

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It's easy enough to visualize Woolrich in his early twenties, pale, gaunt, slipping shadowlike along the walkways of Columbia University to his classes, saying nothing to anyone, and then slipping away again, back to the house on 113th Street. According to *Blues of a Lifetime* it wasn't that way at all. He had a buddy at Columbia, he says, a fellow named Ken who was a year ahead of him in class and a few years ahead in age, a veteran who'd come back from the war with shell shock and a cynical disillusioned attitude and a leg injury requiring him to use a cane and a determination to enjoy to the hilt New York's postwar climate of sexual freedom. Clearly we are meant to see Ken as the next older-brother figure in Woolrich's life. Indeed, he tells us, just as it was an earlier Big Brother, Frank Van Craig, who introduced Woolrich to his first experience of love, so it was this one, Ken, who sponsored his "initiation into the knowing of women," which is Woolrich's Biblical euphemism for sex. The religious imagery continues when Woolrich says that Ken prepared him for the moment "with a grave, conscientious air of responsibility, almost like preparing a Catholic youth for confirmation or first communion. . . ." After first getting him "lubricated with gin," Ken arranges a rendezvous for both of them with two girls in an Upper West Side apartment, probably in Washington Heights.

> I have a recollection of a completely blacked-out living-room, the four of us unseen in the dark, with an occasional faint stirring or whispering, and once in awhile a sudden laugh. And above all of a record that never stopped playing the whole time from first to last. *I'm Just Wild About Harry.* Each time the needle got to the end and started that empty, rustling sound, a pair of stockinged feet would pad across the carpet in the dark . . . and she'd switch the needle-arm back to the beginning and start it over again. . . . I never again could hear that piece without remembering that pitch-black room, though everything else is gone now, the girls' names, their very faces, even Ken himself.

That's it. Nothing about how he felt, whether he enjoyed it, whether his partner enjoyed it, nothing. This for Woolrich is the essence of the sexual experience. No wonder he wasn't interested in repeating it regularly!

So much for his attitude toward the things of the body. How did he react to the things of the mind?

"I . . . enjoyed college somewhat," he wrote in the *McClure's* letter of 1927, "when I was thinking about it." But throughout *Blues of a Lifetime* he says not a word about any intellectual awakening at Columbia, mentions not a single professor or class nor even a book he'd read. Apparently the world of learning was no more important in his life at the time than it is in his fiction later on.

This impression is confirmed by his Columbia transcript. To put it bluntly, most of his grades were wretched. In French they ranged from C+ to F, in Mathematics and German from C to F, in History from C to F with the exception of one grade of B and two of C+, in Fine Arts from D to F with the exception of a single B−. Anyone who has seen photographs of him as a young man will not be surprised to learn that he got a C− in Physical Education. His one class in Philosophy he flunked. He never took any courses in Religion. When he enrolled in Astronomy (perhaps to dispel the fear of the stars that had haunted him since that night in the valley of Anahuac?), he earned a C and a

C−. When he tried Geology (perhaps out of an obscure desire to connect with his engineer father?), his exam grades were D and F. The most respectable marks on his transcript are the freshman Contemporary Civilization courses—two exams scored B+, one B, one C+—and in English, the subject in which he took far more classes than any other. His exam grades in English tended to be on the high side, with six marks of A, four of A−, four of B+, eight of B, but also included eleven that ran from C to F. He was on academic probation between April and November 1925, and he never did graduate.

As good luck would have it, we need not rely just on a piece of paper for our picture of Woolrich at Columbia. The student who sat next to him in two of his English classes went on to become one of the first citizens of the world of the mind, an internationally preeminent cultural historian and philosopher of education. Sixty-odd years later his impressions of the young Woolrich are still vivid.

Jacques Barzun was born on November 30, 1907, at Créteil, a suburb of Paris, the son of a noted author and scholar who introduced Barzun to humane letters at an extremely early age and allowed the boy to roam freely in his vast private library. When he was nine, thanks to the outbreak of World War I and the resulting teacher shortage, Barzun was already serving as instructor to his younger contemporaries at the Lycée Janson de Sailly in Paris. In 1917 Barzun *père* was sent to the United States on a diplomatic mission for the French government. It would have been a touch worthy of a Woolrich novel if he had met George Cornell Tarler while in the States, but that gentleman was posted in Constantinople and Rio at the time. After the war young Jacques joined his father, who had decided to escape the pessimism he saw as pervading European intellectual life by remaining in America. In 1923, before his sixteenth birthday, Jacques Barzun was accepted at Columbia. The young man by whose side he happened to sit during two of his courses—one on creative writing and the other on the English novel—was Cornell Woolrich. I can almost hear a mocking little voice: *Escape from pessimism, would you?*

The Columbia of the early 1920s, under the presidency of the legendary Nicholas Murray Butler, was in the middle of a golden age. Its humanities faculty included John Dewey, John Erskine, Mark Van Doren, Irwin Edman and Mortimer Adler. The course on the English novel that Barzun and Woolrich attended side by side was taught by Harrison R. Steeves (1881–1981), whose own single venture into crime fiction, *Good Night, Sheriff* (1941), was published soon after Woolrich's first suspense novel. The creative writing course was offered by Donald Douglas (1893–1966), who when not teaching wrote novels of historical fantasy. (He left academia in 1929 for a career with an advertising agency and as a newspaper columnist and freelance writer.) In both of these courses, Barzun said in an interview with German documentary film-maker Christian Bauer, he and Woolrich "happened to sit side by side and, as the custom was, one spoke to one's classmate without any particular introduction or any particular purpose." If Woolrich saw himself in those days as a frivolous kid, Barzun saw him differently.

> I found Cornell very shy indeed, very retiring, very suspicious. But somehow, through small incidents that I don't recall—class discussion, the papers that we wrote and that were handed back to us, marked in one way or another—he and I got into more and more conversations. . . . He referred to . . . having traveled abroad a good deal. That was one of the things that, I won't say brought us together, but gave us a kind of common ground. We were not like the rest of the boys in the class, Americans who had never left the United States. I had come from abroad, and he had traveled widely in South America. . . . As far as I could see, I was the only person in either of those classes with whom he had any sort of human dealings. He always rushed out of the class without lingering with any of the other students.

Frequently he'd say things like: "I've got to go now. I've got to see Mother." Barzun never met Claire but sensed that Woolrich was under her domination.

Handed a studio photograph of Woolrich as he looked in the twenties, Barzun recalled that his seatmate had "a certain supercilious look in the eyes, in the set of the mouth, and of course his prominent, well-modeled nose added to the hauteur that he showed. . . . He was abnormally narrow in the face, almost sunken-cheeked, and terribly pale, white. . . . Not that he showed it very much, but he had a sense of humor, particularly a sense of the grotesque, the ironic. He was a rather bitter young man. He made sarcastic comments . . . about life in general, about other people, about institutions, about the older generation." As far as Barzun could judge, he was in "revolt against circumstances and his own character and personality." Barzun himself was quite unhappy as a student, and Woolrich's "bitterness and my at that time rather frequent depression gave us material for discussing the essence of the universe the way young people will do. I think we both alternated between a sense that we *could* do things and a sense that things were impossible. . . . He had a sense of destiny, both on the positive side, that he was going to accomplish something, and on the negative side, that he couldn't possibly do it, something would interfere, the ceiling would fall on him just as a contract was being signed for the next book, or something of the sort." This clearly ties in with the remarks in *Blues of a Lifetime* about Woolrich's lifelong sense of being singled out for doom.

What both Woolrich and Barzun wanted to do was write. The literary idol of American youth in the early and middle twenties was F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), and many a bright young undergraduate dreamed of being kissed with fame and fortune overnight as Fitzgerald had been when his novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920), published when he was twenty-three, had made him an instant sensation and the spokesman for the cynical, disillusioned but withal romantic youth of what he himself christened the Jazz Age. The parallels between Fitzgerald and Woolrich are nothing short of uncanny. Both were baptized as Catholics but rejected all religion. Both were below average height and wanted to be taken for macho men. Both entered college with the aspiration to be professional writers. Both were mediocre students and left school before graduation, never to return. Both had their first novels published at almost identical ages. Each sought in his early fiction to capture the essence of the twenties. The first novel of each is a disjointed, disorganized potpourri of styles and motifs, almost completely lacking a storyline. Each man was fascinated by the movies, longed for Hollywood success, and had bad experiences trying to write screenplays. Both were chain smokers and melancholy alcoholics, prone to self-destructiveness. Both tended to equate sex with defilement and love with something nobler than the body. The relationship between a masochistic man and a Destroying Angel woman figures again and again in the fiction of each. The creative drive of both men tended to fall off in the last ten years of their lives. Each died prematurely, leaving unfinished a major novel that might have restored the reputation he had enjoyed in his prime. Anyone who knows Woolrich and reads a good biography of Fitzgerald, like Matthew J. Bruccoli's *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (1981), will find a host of other similarities. Although there were countless differences between them too, at bottom Fitzgerald and Woolrich were like brothers. Perhaps someday a book will be written about their connection.

Few of these affinities could have been known to Woolrich in 1924 when he took those courses in creative writing and the English novel. But, Jacques Barzun recalled, "Cornell gave me the impression that he had consciousness of being a second Scott Fitzgerald." In a very casual and offhand way the two young men would discuss the literary efforts each was making. "We both would say: 'How's your writing going?' 'Well, pretty well.' 'Well, not so well.' It was a continuing thing for both of us." But neither showed the other what he had written.

> It never occurred to me to ask to see his writings, the way I did with other people on campus, because he was so very withdrawn that one would have been afraid to hurt his feelings, or put him in a position of having to say no in a

> rather brusque manner. . . . Now I can see that [his manner] was possibly, or very likely, insecurity. But it seemed almost like arrogance. . . . Not that we ever had any unpleasant or unhappy encounters. He was very polite, but the kind of politeness that puts one off. . . . It was a strange relation for me. I never had it with any other students. I made lifelong close friendships in the College with people some of whom are still alive and some of whom I still see. But I knew that with Cornell there was no future in our being together. He was a classroom acquaintance.

Even at this early period Woolrich seemed to have a bent for making up stories and passing them off as truth. "He had a way of referring to incidents," Barzun says, "and I never could tell whether they were fiction or part of his life." It was a trait that stayed with him through the writing of *Blues of a Lifetime* and probably beyond to the day he died. Truly he was a man of smoke.

It's possible that the first *noir* situations of Woolrich's overt career as a fiction writer were conjured up for the course he took with Donald Douglas. When an assignment for the class was coming due, he would sometimes brainstorm with Barzun, trying to work up an idea. Barzun recalls him saying something like: "Suppose a man on a train. He's lost his ticket, and he's lost his memory." Put the amnesia motif together with the comment about the falling ceiling and they may add up to the seeds of Woolrich's powerful *noir* novel *The Black Curtain* (1941).

As Barzun describes the end of his relationship with Woolrich, one is again irresistibly reminded of a scene from a Woolrich novel. Sometime during the spring 1925 semester, Barzun recalls, "he just vanished. He didn't show up anymore. I can't trust my memory but I had the impression . . . that he was ill. . . . He never came within my ken again."

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Barzun's impression was correct: his shadowy classmate was ill. The fruit of that illness was his career.

According to the account that circulated during Woolrich's lifetime without contradiction, it was an old sneaker that was responsible, an old soft-soled canvas gym shoe that rubbed his heel raw and caused an infection. The doctor made him keep his foot elevated for six weeks, and by the time he began to walk again he'd completed the first draft of a novel. In *Blues of a Lifetime* Woolrich says it was a severe case of jaundice that kept him immobilized, and claims to have recovered long before that first draft was finished. In the *McClure's* letter of 1927, the account closest in time to the event itself, he doesn't mention illness at all. "I wrote my way out of a course with Dr. John Erskine, in which I was failing. Some fragmentary stuff, written after midnight and turned in in desperation, struck his fancy, won me a high grade and became the nucleus" from which his first novel developed. To expand upon the title of one of Woolrich's best stories of the thirties, you pays your nickel and you takes your choice.

As he tells it in *Blues of a Lifetime*, one day in March during his junior year at Columbia (by which he apparently means in 1924), he came home from class, caught a glimpse of his face in one of the narrow strips of mirror in the front vestibule of 239 West 113th Street, and was shocked to discover that the whites of his eyes had turned yellow. By the next morning his whole face was "the color of lemon-peel" and then became "a full-bodied, repulsive orange." Whenever he tried to eat anything he experienced "brief but excruciating pains in the region of the liver." The doctor diagnosed jaundice, told him to stay away from school for a while and put him on a milk-toast diet. At home alone day after day, Woolrich quickly went through the few books on Grandfather Tarler's shelves, which he found such an insult to his intelligence that he was sure he could write a better book himself. He went through the house, scrounged a pencil and some sheets of loose yellow paper, used a wedge of cardboard from one of his laundered shirts as a support, and wrote a line. "It was not only a line without a plot, it was a line without a chapter, and a line without even a paragraph. Just a detached line, completely out of context." Then he wrote a second line, and a third, and a fourth, the words pouring out onto the page as fast as he could scrawl them down.

From the first, it seems, he was a very rapid writer, and his description of the process is well worth quoting. "The stream of words was like an electric arc leaping across the intervening space from pole to opposite pole, from me to paper. . . . It was tiring and it wouldn't let go. . . . You couldn't stop it, it had to stop by itself. Then it fizzled out again at last, as unpredictably as it had begun. It left me feeling spent. . . ." The overtones of sexual passion are not there by inadvertence. The description strongly suggests that writing took the place of sex in Woolrich's life.

The first line he jotted down on that sheet of yellow paper grew into a paragraph, which expanded into a scene, which blossomed into a chapter but one that "stood alone, by itself, in the middle of nowhere." He developed the chapter into a book by going both forward from it and backward. About halfway through the penciled draft his jaundice cleared up and his face resumed its usual chalk-white shade. When he first returned to Columbia he was still so weak that he fell over into his classroom seat rather than lowering himself in the normal manner. He couldn't write in the daytime anymore but by then he was so addicted that every evening from nine till around midnight he would sit in a quiet room on the second floor of the Tarler house, the door closed, the family out of sight and hearing, a Burmese elephant-head lamp from Grandfather Tarler's travels lit on a pedestal behind him, and he would scribble furiously on the paper balanced against his knee.

Almost at once he increased his natural speed of composition by devising a system of abbreviations and symbols that he used in his correspondence and handwritten first drafts for the rest of his life. "Two crossed lines with a slantwise connection for 'and,' a small g with a line under it for the ending 'ing' on any word, the letter y for 'you' and all its derivatives, 'yours,' 'yourself,' etc.; the numeral 1 followed by 'ce' for 'once,' similarly for 'twice,' and so on; 'bec' for 'because,' and many more. It seems cumbersome at first sight, but it became a great time-saver." When typing up his drafts of course he had to revert to normal usage.

It was also at the start of his writing career that he fell into the habit of not throwing away material that needed to be excised from his current project but saving it for another day. If he liked the line or phrase or paragraph in question, he says in *Blues of a Lifetime*, "I tore off the paper it rested on in a whole, thin, page-wide strip, and pinned or clipped that aside somewhere for future use. . . ." Characteristically, he attributed this habit to two contradictory feelings: youthful pride in every word he'd set down on paper, and fear that he might someday run dry.

By late spring, he says, the first draft of his novel was done, but the manuscript with all its symbols and abbreviations was so chaotically indecipherable (except perhaps by himself) that he decided it should be typed. There were no typewriters in the house, and Woolrich claims not too plausibly that thanks to having wasted all his ready cash on frivolities he didn't have the money to buy one. His solution to the problem was to call on his friend Ken, the shell-shocked war veteran who had earlier seen to his sexual initiation. Ken lived in a furnished room on the edge of the Columbia campus, and Woolrich began spending all his evenings there, using Ken's typewriter to prepare a legible version of the novel but so embarrassed by what he was doing that he pretended it was just schoolwork he was typing up. Ken was out most evenings with one woman or another, and Woolrich found his concentration interrupted on the rather frequent nights when Ken would bring his date back to the room and quietly signal Woolrich to shove off and let him have some privacy. Eventually Woolrich became so frustrated that Ken let him borrow the typewriter, a 1912 Underwood "with an overbearing, top-heavy upper carriage," and lug it over to the Tarler house. He set it up on the base of an ancient sewing machine he found at the back of a closet, the machine on which a dressmaker had created wardrobes for Grandfather Tarler's daughters when they were young. It made an ideal typing table, just large enough to accommodate the Underwood with a strip of border for his deck of Luckies.

Woolrich loved the physical act of typing more than any other writer in the world. In *Blues of a Lifetime* he describes the union between himself and his machine in language musky with sexuality.

> This was a mating if ever there was one. A life-long partnership, a fellowship, a combine, of flesh and of thin steel casing, of fingertips and of keys, of mind and of agilely-responsive mechanism: lower case that turned to upper at a tap, upper that turned back to lower at another tap; asterisks, apostrophes, parentheses, quotation-marks, single quotation-marks to go within the double, hyphens and colons and commas, that flashed up like sparks, and like sparks dimmed again, left behind in the onrush. . . .
>
> And into this transformer, this reagent, went streams of thought and dramatic highspots and narrative stretches printed invisibly on the retina of the mind, and out of it they came printed visibly now in black type on white paper, in order that they could be conveyed to others, and taken in again to the retinas of other minds.

So close was his bond with his machine that in 1940 he dedicated his first overt suspense novel, *The Bride Wore Black,* to the Remington Portable he used throughout most of his writing life.

According to *Blues of a Lifetime,* the weather was hot and Woolrich wore only an undershirt and trousers while sitting in his room in the Tarler house and typing up his first attempt at fiction. One evening, he says, he heard a "suppressed tittering and giggling" somewhere behind him and, going to the window, found two teenage girls with sleek bobbed hair staring at him from the bedroom window of one of the apartments in the building next door. Woolrich didn't bother to pull on a shirt but simply ignored them, another hint that writing for him had taken the place of sex. This experience of being spied on, assuming it really happened, may have been the genesis of perhaps his most famous suspense tale, "It Had To Be Murder" (1942), better known as "Rear Window."

He was alone in the house one day, revising page twenty-two of the typescript, when the doorbell rang. He went downstairs and found a uniformed policeman in the vestibule. Grandfather Tarler, the cop announced bluntly, was dead. "He dropped dead suddenly in a friend's office downtown." The death of George Tarler is one of the few events described in *Blues of a Lifetime* which can be checked against an external source, and the obituary on him in the *New York Times* agrees substantially with Woolrich's version. The date of Tarler's death was April 25, 1925, the cause was heart disease, and the building where he died was 41 Park Row. His age was either 76 or 78. Woolrich didn't cry at the policeman's announcement—"I didn't know how," he says—but went back to his room and sat and thought. "It was the first time I'd ever come up against death." Surprisingly, he doesn't mention his own intimation of mortality in the valley of Anahuac ten or twelve years before. After a while he stepped into his grandfather's room and roamed among his possessions. "It was a way of saying goodbye, I guess." Forty years later, he says, he still remembered the exact number of the page he'd been working on when the doorbell had rung. "Roses die, candles go out, tears dry. The memory of the number on the page outlasts them all."

When he finished his typing and returned the Underwood to Ken, his buddy demanded that Woolrich show his gratitude for the loan of the machine by letting him read the novel. By this time Woolrich was sheepish about the whole project and reluctant to let anyone else see what he'd written but eventually yielded to Ken's insistence. If we are to believe *Blues of a Lifetime,* he then completely forgot about the book for months.

Finally one evening, he says, he went downtown to take in a movie, *Shore Leave* (First National, 1925), a naval comedy with Richard Barthelmess and Dorothy Mackaill. Afterward he felt "lonely standing around at a loss after the crowds started to thin out and go home, but the lights continued to blaze down on the empty, naked-looking sidewalks. . . . I remember how little particles of brightness like mica . . . fused into the cement of the sidewalk, twinkled under the glare of the Paramount Theatre marquee. . . ." Nineteen years later the clock on top of the Paramount would become virtually a living character in his heart-stopping suspense novel *Deadline at Dawn.* He picked up a girl in Times Square, he tells us, and spent the night with her in the Hotel Lucerne on 79th Street. At dawn he came out into the ugly pewter-colored light, went uptown to the Tarler house (where his overnight absence seems to have gone unnoticed), washed, changed, had a cup of coffee and went out to his morning class at Columbia. Later that day he happened to meet Ken on one of the campus walkways, remembered that his buddy still had the typescript of the novel and gruffly demanded it back. Ken replied that he had lent it to one of his girlfriends, who worked as a typist or switchboard operator at Boni & Liveright, a small but distinguished publishing house. Woolrich insisted on getting the typescript back. He and Ken dropped into one of the dormitory buildings and Ken went into a phone booth to call his girlfriend while Woolrich cooled his heels in the lobby. Suddenly Ken came running out of the booth and announced that

Boni & Liveright wanted to publish his novel. On this note the first chapter of *Blues of a Lifetime* comes to an end.

In a letter published in the January 1947 issue of *Mystery Book Magazine*, fifteen years or more before his autobiography, Woolrich told a radically different story about breaking into print. "I started writing a novel while I was eighteen and still at Columbia," he begins, pretending as usual that he was born in 1906. "It grew and it grew and all of a sudden it was through. I went around asking, 'What do I do next?' One of the upperclassmen said, 'Don't be a chump. Take it to a publisher.' So I sent it to Boni & Liveright." Three weeks later, upset over not having received even a postcard from the firm in reply, he visited its offices in the Forties. "I had to climb three flights of stairs and this made me even angrier." On the third-floor landing he met Beatrice Kaufman, the wife of playwright George S. Kaufman and a manuscript reader for the firm. According to Woolrich's letter it was Mrs. Kaufman who gave him the news that Boni & Liveright was going to publish his novel. "So they did," he concludes, "and I quit school to write." Anyone tempted to believe that this time he's telling the unvarnished truth will be disillusioned to learn that Woolrich goes on to identify the novel in question by the wrong title.

However it came about, the sale of his first book to Boni & Liveright was the turning point in Woolrich's life. As soon as the book was published he quit Columbia and his lackluster career as a student to pursue his dream of bright lights and gay music and adulation as the second F. Scott Fitzgerald.

CHAPTER TWO

At the time it purchased Woolrich's first novel, the publishing house of Boni & Liveright was at the cutting edge of contemporary American fiction. Its offerings in 1925 alone included Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter*, Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, William Faulkner's first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*, and *In Our Time*, the first collection of short stories by Ernest Hemingway. But in the year of *The Great Gatsby* Boni & Liveright had no author contending for the mantle of F. Scott Fitzgerald, until luck brought to its offices a manuscript by a white-faced Columbia undergrad named Woolrich.

Cover Charge was published in March of 1926, a few months after Woolrich's twenty-second birthday. One can imagine the competitive glow in his heart when he held the first copies of the book in his hand and realized that he was more than a year younger than Fitzgerald had been at the publication of *This Side of Paradise*. Woolrich follows the lead of early Fitzgerald in dispensing with plot and adopts a huge variety of stylistic mannerisms, like switching in mid-scene from standard narration to the historical present and from third person to second, and like obtruding his own omniscient voice into the proceedings when the spirit moves him, for no better reason than that his literary idol had used them. Saturated with Fitzgerald's influence, Woolrich guides us through the period from 1917 to 1925 and through the lives and loves of a number of sons and daughters of the Jazz Age, the gilded youth, flitting like birds without nests from thrill to thrill, talking to each other in an arcane jargon comprised of insults, silent movie titles and popular song lyrics, coming across not as adults but rather, to borrow a phrase from the book itself, as "wisps of moonbeam"—or more precisely as children playing dress-up. But for every borrowing from Fitzgerald in the novel there are half a dozen touches that either come straight out of Woolrich's own life or prefigure one of the motifs of his suspense fiction, or both.

Like all his pre-crime novels and most of his later books as well, *Cover Charge* is dedicated to no one. The novel is divided into three parts, each one introduced by a line from a current song. The motto for Part I, "Matinee," is "Nothing but laughter/Morning and afternoon," but there's very little laughter in this section's four chapters, which take place in 1917 and 1918, the years of America's involvement in the First World War. We open in the New York apartment shared by two young men, whose relationship foreshadows that of the protagonists in Woolrich's later suspense stories about roommates, such as "I'll Never Play Detective Again" (1937) and "He Looked Like Murder" (1941). And a plush apartment it is. "Luminaires were lit upon the walls, and from an orange dish a pencil-line of azure hung breathlessly above an expiring cigarette." That cigarette is the first of literally thousands that Woolrich characters will smoke. Twenty-two-year-old Alan Walker and his sidekick, whose name (believe it or not, Roy Rogers fans!) is Dale Evans, are dressing for a formal dinner party at the Long Island home of the wealthy Hollander family, but Alan has a surprise in store. He will be attending the dinner not in tie and tails but in khaki, for in a weak moment he has just enlisted in the Army. As he and Dale are getting ready to leave, a telegram arrives from the War Department, announcing that Alan's older brother Merritt has been killed in action. Suddenly death is real to him as it was to Woolrich when the ringing doorbell had brought the news that Grandfather Tarler had died. Alan decides to get out of military service. "Here's to the war," he says, lifting a cocktail glass. "I hope they won't mind if I keep them waiting a bit." Sprinkled through this first chapter are moments of evocation as visually dazzling as a movie scene, for instance this one as Alan's stepsister gets out of an elevator.

> [A]t the end of the corridor two sheets of frosted glass grew flooded with electric light, separated with a slight click, and revealed Jenny surrounded by mirrors and ornamental gilding. She stepped out, the panes closed behind her, and the glow of light ebbed to the floor.

In the second chapter there are more such moments as Woolrich describes the Hollanders' dining room.

> A frieze of grotesque magnified shadows occupied the walls, wavering with the slow precision of deep-sea life. In the center of everything, like a jeweled grotto, there was a profusion of flowers, brilliants, virginal candle flames, and an infinite number of reflections and counter-reflections sending off beams in all directions from glasses and mirrored silverware. A pool of ghostly light clung to the ceiling directly over a lustrous fruit dish, like some holy eye looking mercilessly down on everything.
>
> The candles had grown misshapen with wax drippings and the room was by now a milky-blue jungle infested with vines and lianas as cigarettes gave up their ghosts like djinns toward the ceiling above. Someone had upset a demi-tasse over the tablecloth. The dinner was over.

Afterward most of the guests, including Dale Evans, take off in their automobiles for Forty Winks, the Greenwich Village cellarette run by Alan's stepsister Jenny. Alan stays behind with vivacious young Claire Hollander, who is named of course for Woolrich's mother, and he becomes so captivated by the "aura of romance and unreality" she projects that even though he hardly cares for her at all he sits in a window seat with her and asks her to marry him. Once the engagement is settled, Alan finds himself with no auto available to take him back to the city (as if the Hollanders couldn't have called a cab for him!) and starts walking along the highway in a frenzy of euphoria. An expensive limousine stops to give him a lift and he meets its occupants, two middle-aged foreign-born demimondaines named Irma and Fritzi. Both of them lose no time making passes at him. In the first of the hundreds of absurd coincidences with which the Woolrich oeuvre is replete, Irma had had a Riviera flirtation with Merritt Walker in the summer of 1914 but had never bothered to learn his first name and now mistakes Alan for his older brother, who in fact is dead. And so they ride into New York,

> the city, the city, that towering feast of lanterns that lay hidden beyond the next rise of ground or possibly the next after that. Nothing was too marvelous to expect of it, and in the uncertain twilight that hovered above his head thousands of lips pouted to be tested, thousands of eyes implored. The world was sweet, the world was young yet.

> Down into the mighty city rode Alan. . . . Music he would dance to was still unwritten; the city was his birthday cake, all alight with tall candles climbing the skies, and he the cake-eater. Down, down, into a vortex of taxicabs and saxophones. . . .

The third and by far the longest of the book's nine chapters follows Alan through simultaneous affairs with both of these women who are old enough to be his mother. Irma and Fritzi, who supposedly are the best of buddies like Alan and Dale, learn of each other's romance with Alan during a chance encounter at Forty Winks and claw at each other like a pair of cats. A conveniently discovered heart murmur saves Alan from military service, and to avoid further brushes with the draft he takes out South American citizenship papers. Irma is deported by the government, and Alan walks out on the posh party celebrating his engagement to Claire Hollander in order to help Fritzi close up Irma's apartment and safeguard her valuables from her rapacious black maid. When he returns to the ritzy hotel where the engagement party has fizzled out, Claire's mother is so infuriated by his scandalous behavior that she drags her daughter away from him and cancels the marriage plans. Then Alan's wealthy family disinherits him, and at the end of the chapter he sets out to find a job.

In Chapter Four, "Jazz Beau," he's living in a roach-infested room in the West Sixties and trying to survive on a soda jerk's wages. Before long he quits the fountain in disgust, pays a visit to Dale Evans at the old apartment, is invited to a party at a Palais de Dance, and decides to become a professional dancing partner for lonely older women. Although the sexes are reversed, this is the first appearance of the taxi dance theme that runs through several of Woolrich's later suspense stories, of which the best known is "Dime a Dance" (1938). The months go by, with the passage of time reflected in the lyrics of one popular song after another, as Alan rises to the status of "a super-gigolo, sweeping them off their feet." On the night of the Armistice, November 11, 1918, the cab taking him to his stint at Jazzland is sidetracked by a raucous outdoor block party at Ninth Avenue and 59th Street, clearly based on the scene where Woolrich had encountered Veronica/Vera Gaffney for the last time. Stepping out of the cab and making his way through the crowd, he runs into a charming young "shanty Irish" lass named Veronica Daugherty.

> This is the night of all nights, tomorrow the world begins anew. The world has gone up in smoke and flame. Dance, dance, dance, dance among the ashes. Jazz, jazz, jazz, jazz forever more.

Part II, "Soiree," opens with another song lyric: "All my life is just despair, what do I care—When he takes me in his arms the world is bright all right—." For the next forty-odd pages Alan Walker is forgotten and we are immersed in Veronica's life and world. "She lived in the shadow of the Elevated, and trains of orange or of green cars stormed by her window all day long, and at night they were like comets—streaks of blazing light, broken here and there by the spaces between cars, and ending in twin lights, one red one green, far down the track." She is in her late teens and lives in that tenement flat with her brother Dennis, who's a petty criminal, and her kid sister Mary, and their ancient crone of a grandmother. She works in a beauty parlor and haunts the picture palaces.

> Veronica liked the movies. You could go for a nickel in the daytime and ten cents at night. You saw John Bunny and Flora Finch, oh, they were so fun-nee, and between times a voice in the dark sang, "You made me what I am today, I hope you're satisfied," while gorgeous colored slides of apoplectic moons and cabbage roses slipped on and off the screen.

She starts surreptitiously dating a neighborhood mug named Burke, who in the thirties would be called a Cagney character, and before long is sleeping with him. Woolrich's treatment of this is surprising in view of what he wrote about premarital sex in *Blues of a Lifetime* almost forty years later.

> She went home that night with a sense of anti-climax; though she had given herself to him the stars did not drop out of the heavens nor people stone her in the streets. The papers bore headlines telling of the fall of Soissons, not the fall of Veronica.

When Dennis slaps her around for being a tramp she moves in with Burke, who supports the two of them by sticking up affluent blacks on their way back to Harlem from late-night cabarets, and who is also sleeping with Veronica's best friend Rosalie. After Burke is arrested on the street and publicly beaten by the cops—the first of dozens of instances of police brutality in the Woolrich canon—Veronica moves back in with Mary and her grandmother. By this time Dennis is fighting in France. Then comes the block party celebrating the Armistice and the chance meeting between Veronica and Alan Walker, who gives her a pass to Jazzland, where he dances, a pass good only that night. The chapter closes with an intense montage of jazz and eroticism prefiguring the memorable jam session scene from Woolrich's 1942 masterpiece *Phantom Lady.*

> "Yah-de-dah," said the saxes, "yah-de-dah."
> "Shake a wicked shoulder, shake a little bolder, Shake a little motion, like a baby ocean—"
> "Yah-de-dah, yah-de-dah." And the tambourines rustled jinga bula, jinga bula, jinga bula, jing, jing, jing. Red lips, red lights, red music . . . .
> "Wha-wha-wha-wha-wha—" said the saxophones . . . .
> Jazz, jazz, jazz. Bom bom, chicka chicka bom bom. Tom tom, tuppa tuppa tom tom.
> "Won't you? will you?"
> "Will you, won't you, do you, don't you, ain't you, have you, yes?" . . . .
> "Vamp a little lady, vamp a little lady, vamp a little lady, vamp a little lady—" . . . .
> Doo wacka doo wacka doo wacka doo . . . .

And Alan asks Veronica to spend the night with him. The next day she returns to the tenement laden with expensive gifts from him and announces that her name from now on is Vera.

Woolrich covers the period from the end of the war to 1922 in a few paragraphs.

> The seasons come and go. Hindustan, Ka-lu-a, the Japanese Sandman. Dances come and go. The shimmy gives way to the Chicago, the Chicago to the camel walk. The camel walk will in time give way to something else. Nothing lasts.

Alan Walker and Vera Daugherty become celebrities when they enter a dance marathon and waltz in each other's arms for six days and nights without interruption. The scene foreshadows one of the most powerful of Woolrich's early suspense tales, "Dead on Her Feet" (1935). They become a ballroom team in the tradition of Vernon and Irene Castle, and their success is sensational. They get married on impulse and honeymoon in Atlantic City. "The sea became apple-green in the early evening light, and behind them the lights of a gigantic ferris wheel were interlaced against the sky." They make scads of money doing specialty dances in Manhattan caberets and roof garden revues and in the movies and in Broadway musical comedies with names like *Oh Oh* and *Anna Banana*. After a year of exhausting and lucrative performances they give themselves a vacation and go to Mexico for a visit with Alan's wealthy aunt Manuela Saunders, who is a childless widow and, if buttered up properly, may make Alan her heir.

By this ploy Woolrich moves his protagonists to the land where he'd spent his youth. Manuela, who hasn't seen New York since 1912, is the widow of a thumbtack tycoon, and her plantation, El Paraiso, is two days' journey from Mexico City, "toward the lowlands along the Bay of Campeche." On their arrival Alan and Vera discover that childless Manuela has adopted a sixteen-year-old girl named Georgine, thereby knocking Alan's hopes of inheritance into a cocked sombrero. Manuela is something of a culture vulture and Georgine a moony romantic, a situation that kicks off the funniest moment in the book when they try to discuss literature with the ignoramus Vera.

> Manuela: "Do you read many novels?"
> Vera: "I read one once. I only read certain parts of it, though. It was called *The Sheik*. Did you ever read it?"
> Georgine: "I like Whitman."
> Vera: "Me too, I think he's great! We heard him at the Palais Royal the night before we left. Have you got any of his records?"

Awed by Alan's fame as a dancer and smitten by his good looks, Georgine entices him into "a roofless summer house built of interlaced canes, smothered with bougainvillea climbing up its sides. . . . A solid wall of flowers, the open sky above. . . . Here not a leaf stirred and the evening light came through the lattice to them the color of strained honey. . . . An immortality of happiness was here." Alan and Georgine confess their hopeless loneliness to one another and the girl faints in Alan's arms. Vera, already miserable in the sticky mosquito-infested environment so far from the lights of New York, senses what is happening between her husband and this teenager. They leave El Paraiso together but at each other's throats, and it's clear that the marriage is functionally dead as Part II comes to an end.

The third and final section, "Gigolo and Gigolette," opens with yet another romantic song lyric, too lengthy to quote here. Alan and Vera are forgotten for almost twenty-five pages during which we explore the short and unhappy life of Georgine. She's the daughter of Frances Devereux, a divorced musical comedy actress. At the age of seven, on a steamer to Rio with her mother, she's already a little temptress, stealing Frances's lipstick to entice the ship's wireless operator. At the age of eleven she is taken to see a traveling French company perform *Madame Butterfly*, which her mother decides is too tragic for a child to experience. At the age of twelve, seeing Frances lose everything she owns in a fashionable card game so that she has to give herself to the elegant Mr. Pryce-Jones to get her debts cancelled, Georgine sets out to break up their affair. When Frances dies in a freak boating accident in Rio's harbor, Georgine is adopted by Manuela Saunders and begins her life anew, "with books and dreams and bougainvillea clambering up the wall."

Six months after being visited by Alan and Vera, Manuela Saunders liquidates her Mexican holdings and returns to New York with Georgine in tow. Together they take in the big town's cabarets, including the Jockey Club, where Alan and Vera are dancing. While Georgine tries to get an affair going with Alan, Manuela is pursued by none other than Alan's ex-roommate Dale Evans, who in turn is pursued by Betty, an assistant at a photography studio. After an impromptu party and several huge glassfuls of gin and grapefruit juice, Manuela and Dale sneak away to Connecticut and get married. That same night, May 15, 1924, Alan is seriously injured in a drunken auto smashup. Georgine is told that he'll never dance again. Terrified as if by a revelation of the nature of the universe, she rushes to an empty church in the middle of the night and says the first of several Prayers to an Absent God that run through the Woolrich canon.

> We are nothing, he and I. I know I have no right to come here. I am strange. I don't know this place. But how can I help asking, when he is so little to anyone else and all I have to me. The best of us are no better than the worst, we're all the same. And we know pity for each other, how can God be without it? Only let us be, we will make our own heaven. Oh, blind God of happenings, dead or living, you cannot change me.

In the novel's final chapter we get what the always movie-minded Woolrich calls a "close-up" of Alan's last night as a whole man. It is Vera's birthday, and the sophisticates have gathered at the Walkers' plush house on 32nd Street for an appropriately arty party.

> There's Fiscott Yerrold, the romantic writer. He's from Bridgeport, but a child of all the world. To him this must seem a Sunday-school picnic. You never saw the like of *his* parties. People come to them in evening dress and go away in bathing suits, or else the men and women have exchanged clothes, and things like that. One time—but let's be broad-minded.

And over there is the homosexual coterie, for which Woolrich clearly has nothing but contempt.

> The male and female parrots preen themselves and hobnob. In a corner made delightful with cushions, certain parrots of indeterminate reproductive instincts dip their bills in Vera's creme-de-menthe while they claw her husband to death because they know he doesn't approve of them. Parrot talk.

The party is crashed by none other than Burke, Vera's Cagneyesque ex-lover, who is now out of prison and determined to wring some hush money out of her. "A sadist fury overtakes them all." The women at the party tear at Burke and chase him out to the street. Furious to learn that he wasn't the first man to sleep with her, Alan has a spat with Vera and gets behind the wheel of their limousine and races suicidally into the night, with what result we've already been told.

The last scene in the book takes place exactly one year later, again on Vera's birthday. By this time she has a new dance partner, a Latinate homosexual named Del Francia, and Alan, his legs useless, is barely surviving in a squalid furnished room. "[H]is hair had begun to recede from the front of his skull and behind the hollows of his eyes were secrets it is not good to guess at." In a drunken stupor he hobbles to a phone and tries to call Vera but reaches Georgine, who comes to him through the night, "in a flitting rain of silver pine-needles that every passing street-light cast into her eyes and face." What is Alan thinking of? "Alan's mind was on death. Death is sleep. Death is sorrow. There are no saxophones in the grave." Georgine comes to his side and says goodbye. "I hate this world," he cries out. "Everything comes into it so clean and goes out so dirty." Reading this scene, knowing how closely it prophesies the shape of Woolrich's own last years and days, we cannot hold back a shudder.

Woolrich's publishers were apparently worried that readers wouldn't understand the novel's title and included an explanation in their advertising and publicity releases. As summarized in a lengthy unsigned review in the *New York Times*, "the cover charge is what we incur when we reserve the table, it is what we must pay before we leave. It is the fee for pleasure—and when did pleasure fail to exact its fee?" If we are less smugly puritanical than the reviewer, and treat the book as part of a continuum that includes Woolrich's later *noir* fiction, a broader interpretation suggests itself. The cover charge is the painfully earned, disillusioned insight into the nature of the world that comes with living in the world and that is refined down to six words in what I have always thought the perfect Woolrich title. He included it on a list of titles for stories he never got around to writing, but he might just as aptly have attached it to this first novel or indeed to any number of his later novels or stories. The title is *First You Dream, Then You Die*.

Reviewers greeted *Cover Charge* with mixed reactions. The *New York World* called it "an interesting novel, skilfully written by a knowing hand." Woolrich, said Louis Kronenberger in *The Literary Review*, "has verve and facility and keen perceptions. His book is remarkably readable and, for one of his age, remarkably craftsmanlike." It was described in some quarters as having "an exuberant vitality," "rowdy, vivid," "a brilliant, impertinent melodrama," written in a "sparkling, unusual style," "with fluency and frequently with great beauty."

Other reviewers were impressed much less or not at all. "It is a depressing book," said the *Boston Independent*, "the more so because its dreary theme is treated with a smart capability worthy of a better cause." M.A. Murphy in *The International Book Review* thought that "in spots the author shows a mastery of both medium and material" but that on the whole *Cover Charge* suffered from "unevenness of both form and finish." The anonymous *New York Times* critic condemned the book's lack of structure—"Mr. Woolrich, by ignoring the principle of selection, blurs his tonal effects"—but praised the Veronica Daugherty sequence as "one of the finest cameos of the [slum] district it has been our lot to meet." The *Springfield Republican* hated the novel, saying that it "falls short of being even a passable burlesque of the form it seeks to imitate." Perhaps Woolrich was frightened away from too ambitious a second novel by some of the negative reviews of his first. But before he started another book he tried his hand at perhaps the most lucrative form of literary endeavor available to an American writer in the twenties: the short story.

• • •

Woolrich claimed in a 1945 letter that his first published magazine tale had been written on request. A few weeks after *Cover Charge* came out, he said,

> I received a telegram . . . from the editor of *College Humor*, asking for a story. I wrote it at night, knocking off at about 4 A.M., and then went to classes at 9. He sent me a check for $300 for it, so I figured it was worth a few hours of lost sleep. I stopped being so conscientious after that, though, and did the next one in the daytime, on my school time. I made $12,000 in my first full year of writing, but flunked German (I think it was). I never did make up the extra credits I needed for that. It was more fun writing. And a lot more remunerative.

According to his Columbia transcript, Woolrich took his final exams for the spring 1926 semester but flunked history and geology and averaged a mediocre C+ even in English. He never went back to school, probably feeling that his effortless success as a writer made college unnecessary.

The editor who bought that first short story from him has a different version of their encounter. In the thirties H.N. Swanson (b.1899) was to set up shop in Hollywood, where he became the dean of movie agents, representing John O'Hara, Thornton Wilder, John P. Marquand, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, even F. Scott Fitzgerald and, on occasion, Woolrich himself. In the twenties Swanson was editing one of the decade's leading magazines of light fiction, *College Humor*. Although based in Chicago, he traveled frequently to New

York to meet and negotiate with writers. Apparently he first met Woolrich early in 1926, when the weather was still chilly. As he remembers the occasion it was Woolrich who approached him, not vice versa. "One day," he says in his autobiography, *Touched with Ruby Dust* (1988), "a white-faced bizarre-looking creature in a black overcoat which reached to his toes came to see me. He said his name was Cornell Woolrich, and stressed the fact that he was a good writer. He pushed a script at me and fled." In a letter to me written several years ago Swanson described the scene more fully.

> This boy-man looked like he might have stepped out of a Charles Addams drawing. He wore very dark clothes, a long black overcoat that almost hit his shoes, and he had a white face and the appearance of not having enough to eat . . . I think the only money he spent on himself was to sit in some of those gloomy bistros amid the plastic noisy surroundings of a dance joint.

Whoever approached whom, to Swanson belongs the honor of having purchased the first Woolrich short story to see the light of print. Unfortunately it's just a frothy trifle, more or less in the same vein as the commercial romances that Fitzgerald ground out for *The Saturday Evening Post* and similar magazines of the twenties to subsidize his novels. "Honey Child" (*College Humor*, September 1926) is a spoiled New Orleans belle who comes to New York with her black maid for a shopping spree and a round of parties, at one of which a handsome young submarine officer is smitten by her charm. Just before the flirtatious vixen is to catch the train back to Louisiana she visits the sub, which is moored off Manhattan's 96th Street pier, to say goodbye to her Billy. He however demands that she marry him, and when she refuses, he locks her in his quarters and—at least so it seems—orders the submarine out to sea. This naval maneuver instantly convinces Honey Child that Billy really loves her and she agrees to become his bride. He then confesses that actually the sub has moved no farther than the 79th Street pier! The only characteristic Woolrich touch in this youthful groaner is the use of popular song lyrics ("That certain feeling,/When first I met you") to convey mood. The illustrations were by James Montgomery Flagg.

If *College Humor* was the young Woolrich's best market for short material, his second best was the equally popular and lucrative *McClure's Magazine*. His only other story to be published in the year of his debut as a writer was "Dance It Off!" (*McClure's*, October 1926), a much more mature and meaty tale about the two women in the life of young Wally Walters, a typical 1920s cake-eater and champion dancer of the Charleston. Wally's regular girl is nice safe reliable Connie, who calls him "Cake" and loves nothing more than going dancing with him. But Wally is a man whose spiritual kin pop up constantly in Woolrich's later suspense fiction, a man "always hungering for something out of reach" just as Alan Walker was in *Cover Charge*, a man whom no conventional woman will satisfy. In this and several other respects, such as his love of dancing, Wally is a Woolrich self-portrait, and the description of his bleak little apartment brilliantly captures the essence of Woolrichian man.

> It was a true image of his life, that small room. Disarranged, meaningless, pitiful, choked with trifles, trying hard to be gay but sad at heart. There was a picture of a motion picture actress, Clara Bow, clipped from a magazine and pasted to the wall. There was a tambourine hanging on a nail, and a gilt false-face hanging from its elastic on another. There were girls' telephone numbers scribbled everywhere, although the landlady was furious about it. On the dresser there was a ten cent store doll with blue cotton batting for hair; some one had penciled a mustache along its upper lip. There was in addition a nickel-plated pocket flask lying on its side, a feathered bamboo tickler from one of the Chinese restaurants, several menus, a bottle with a little hair grease, turned rancid, in the bottom of it, and the remains of a package of cigarets. Also a copper ashtray with chewing gum stuck to it, and one of orange clay with collar buttons and a toothbrush in it.

One Saturday night Wally attends a performance of the season's hit musical comedy *Lucille* and falls passionately in love with its star, Mimi Travers, who satisfies his need for a woman exotic, touched with mystery, aching with loneliness and despair. As chance would have it, Mimi is scheduled to judge a Charleston contest that night after the show. Wally enters the contest and dances for her, winning a silver loving cup and winding up so deeply involved with Mimi that he breaks with safe reliable Connie. "It must be love, it must be love,/ That makes me feel this way," plays the band as the new couple leave together. But Mimi is not at all in love with Wally, she's just playing a heartless game with him, and within a week she's given him the cold shoulder and left town. A distraught Wally finds Connie still loyally waiting for him and realizes that she is indeed the one he needs. Countless Woolrich protagonists—lonely men dreaming of otherworldly romantic fulfillment—are foreshadowed in Wally Walters, who is also the prototype for a number of male characters in books and films by others. For example, the relationships between James Stewart, Kim Novak and Barbara Bel Geddes in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 masterpiece *Vertigo* are uncannily similar to those between Wally, Mimi and Connie in "Dance It Off!"

The next story Swanson bought from Woolrich was "Bread and Orchids" (*College Humor*, January 1927), which opens with a superb description of a twenties hotel lobby.

> Hotels. . . . In the cities of today they rise like magic, thirty, forty, fifty odd stories above the street. All day and all night dozens of lighted elevators rush up and down, like quicksilver in thermometers, carrying people in morning clothes, people in evening clothes, people in sport togs, people in bathing suits. The city could burn down to the ground, and if these hotels were left standing you would still be able to find every phase of life reproduced exactly as it had been on the outside: jewelry shops, haberdashery, fancy diving, bootlegging, florists, marcel waving, millinery, bridge, billiards, and tea for two, or three, or four—but mostly for two (and not always tea either).

The protagonists are two typical twenties girls, Irene Mallory and Teddy Fern. Irene falls in love with a young man named Jimmy Lord and the three take to partying together. Before long Irene and Jimmy are engaged, but then during a visit to the Tic Tac Toe nightclub, which "charged seven dollars a bottle for White Rock and ten for corkage," Irene is unceremoniously yanked from the picture by a big blonde named Miss Barney who proceeds to appropriate Jimmy for herself. Helpful Teddy intervenes by making an anonymous phone call to the club and warning Miss Barney that Jimmy Lord is a sex fiend who spikes girls' chicken à la king with aphrodisiac narcotics as a prelude to inviting them for a moonlight drive. This ploy having neatly disposed of Miss Barney, Irene happens to drop in at the ideal moment to resume her relationship with Jimmy.

If the bleak world of "Dance It Off!" is akin to what Woolrich portrayed in *Cover Charge*, the superficial ambience of his first two short stories for Swanson is all too well reflected in his second novel.

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Children of the Ritz pleased Swanson as much as those stories had. Divided into four installments, it was serialized in the August through November 1927 issues of *College Humor* before being published in hardcover by Boni & Liveright on October 15. Whatever editors and readers of the twenties may have thought, it holds up poorly today. Structurally it's more unified than *Cover Charge*, just as Scott Fitzgerald's second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), had been more tightly constructed than *This Side of Paradise*. But it's also much less ambitious and more conventional than its predecessor, with relatively few of the vibrant visual evocations that were to become a hallmark of Woolrich's suspense fiction, and only a handful of moments that are traceable back to his past life or forward in his future work.

The novel is a Jazz Age social comedy whose theme, rich girl weds poor boy, may have been suggested to Woolrich by the unlikely marriage of his mother to a Mexican engineer. Willful, spoiled eighteen-year-old Angela Pennington lives in a lavish Long Island mansion with her mother Diane and her tycoon father and her older sister Lyle and—whenever he's been kicked out of college, which is often—her useless brother Gilbert, plus a host of obsequious servants. The most recently acquired of these is the family chauffeur, a gruffly handsome twenty-six-year-old of Shanty Irish lineage named Dewey Haines. The Haines ancestral domicile is an apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side, on Amsterdam Avenue "with its miles of six and eight story flats all looking exactly alike in the dark, the window front of an occasional all-night delicatessen or lunchroom bleaching the sidewalk in front of it." The scene is reminiscent of the Daughertys' apartment in *Cover Charge* and that of Vera in "The Poor Girl." In the flat reside Dewey's genial kid sister Margie and their indomitable and irrepressible mother Bessie, with frequent visits from Margie's boyfriend Gaffney the bookie, whose name comes of course from that of Vera's family. No sooner is Dewey hired as the Penningtons' chauffeur than Angela begins "an adolescent flirtation of the chocolate fudge sort" just to see how he'll react.

Then comes the great seesaw movement in the characters' social status. At almost the same instant that wealthy Mr. Pennington loses all his money and makes a clumsy attempt at suicide, Dewey wins $50,000 on a 20 to 1 long shot at the racetrack. Within twenty-four hours of these events, the heiress and the chauffeur are joined in the bonds of wedlock. Angela's motivation for this drastic step is clear.

> She wanted to be amused, wanted it with desperate intensity. And a great fear was creeping on her now that the days of amusement were numbered. The bright golden cocoon that had been woven about her was breaking in pieces. The bottom was falling out of her life . . . ; she wanted pleasure desperately, as never before.

She is terrified at the prospect of losing the sense "that she had been made for furs and musical perfume bottles, that her destiny was to tread on petals of roses and to snatch at the stars from a tall tower set high above the world," and she's throwing herself at the first hunk of cash she sees. But what of Dewey's motivation? He knows that she's a petulant narcissistic brat but, as he tells her, "I have a funny little catch or latch or indicating valve some place down in here," meaning of course his sturdy proletarian heart, "and it won't let me go very far wrong." He sees through her facade but his heart tells him to marry her anyway, so they drive up to Connecticut and tie the knot. Their wedding breakfast consists of strawberries and coffee at 6:00 A.M. in a workingmen's lunch counter.

When Angela returns to the Pennington mansion with her newly minted husband, her mother and sister instantly disown her for betraying her class, and she packs her things and leaves home to start life over with Dewey, on his racetrack money of course, in a posh New York hotel. For all Woolrich tells us or even hints, their marriage is virginal: in this milieu sex doesn't exist. Almost at once the story of their elopement hits the papers and they become overnight celebrities, gawked at by thousands whenever they appear in public. As if the permanent siege of their hotel suite by mobs clamoring for a peek at them weren't strain enough on the marriage, Angela demands $500 a day in mad money from Dewey, whose thrifty soul is outraged by the conspicuous consumption she takes to be her birthright. Complaints from other guests about the mob furor cause the hotel to evict the newlyweds, who find an apartment on the Upper West Side just off Broadway, probably within easy walking distance of 239 West 113th Street.

The rest of the book explores the changes in the characters' lives that stem from the changes in their positions on the socioeconomic ladder. Dewey's mother and sister move into a middle-class apartment. Margie starts putting on airs and sets out to "bury the past and do the Black Bottom on its grave." She insists on calling herself Marjorie and her mother Betty, takes regular baths with half a dozen varieties of bath salts, dresses and poses in imitation of her new sister-in-law, reads *The New Yorker* and Fitzgerald, pressures her mother also to wear the latest styles and have her hair bobbed. Bessie takes a copy of Fitzgerald's most recent book, the story collection *All the Sad Young Men* (1926), crosses out the third word of the title and pencils in *Glad*. "Now it's the way it should be. Now ye can read it without being made gloomy by the very thought." Meanwhile Dewey's gorge is rising with the mountain of bills—$286 for a gold dinner gown and $60 a month for frosted chocolate drinks—and Angela is leaning on him to drop his plebeian habits, learn to dance and play bridge, keep his shoes shiny and his cheeks freshly shaved and powdered at all times and his checkbook open to her whims. She also makes him move into a separate bedroom so she can have the privacy she's been used to all her life, and he doesn't even let out a whimper. In Woolrich true marriage is by definition chaste.

And yet we are not meant to believe that Dewey's infallible heart has played him false. Woolrich intersperses the scenes of conflict between this oddest of odd couples with moments of deep rapport and tenderness, as when they make French toast in their new kitchen at four in the morning. "She struck a match, turned something in front of the porcelain range, and a row of twinkling blue beads came into existence in the satanic depths of it, like midget sapphire stalactites in a cavern." The scene begins with Angela as childish as ever—"I feel as though I were playing with dolls all over again," she says—but soon mutates into near-*noir* intensity. "Sometimes I think I love you more than any woman ought to love any man," she tells him, "even her own husband." And thoughts of love lead, inevitably in Woolrich, to thoughts of death. "I guess I've seen a thousand suns go down and been alone a thousand evenings. What enemies of ours those suns are that go down in the evening and never come back any more. Oh, Dewey, to think that we've got to grow old like all the rest have." And they embrace "almost as though they were afraid of being taken from each other."

Nevertheless the marriage is clearly in trouble. Dewey doesn't move out but starts going over to his mother's for meals. As the Penningtons' financial health returns to normal, Angela regrets more and more her marriage to this hulking young lout. Then her brother Gilbert introduces her to an older friend who helped him out during the family's economic crunch, a well-to-do divorced man-about-town named Jerry Wilder. Quickly Angela is smitten, for he is all the things Dewey is not. "Everything might have turned out differently," she confides in Gil, "if I had met his type a—a month or two ago." When she returns home she looks out the apartment window into the darkness. "The facades of the tall cliff dwellings opposite were unrelieved by a single light, the canyon-like street below was deserted except for an occasional wandering taxicab, night bound and winking with green eyes." Standing by the window, "Jerry," she says to herself, "I love you. It's too late, but I'm afraid I love you."

The marriage continues to sour as the Pennington family's economic picture continues to brighten. At first condescending to Dewey's mother and sister and amused by their social gaffes, Angela soon becomes appalled, insults them to their faces, pulls bitchy little tricks on them when she can get away with it and refuses to allow them in "her" home. Her extravagance mounts until one evening when she unwraps a $4,000 fur coat, "softly rubbing her cheek against the rich collar" just as Woolrich had seen Vera Gaffney do, while the radio ironically plays "Mem'ries I recall of all your pretty little love tales." Dewey issues an ultimatum: she'll have exactly six thousand a year to spend on herself and not a penny more. It's no surprise that the first year's allowance is spent within twenty-four hours. Angela happens to meet Jerry Wilder at an ice skating rink to which she'd gone off alone, and finds him more attractive than ever. Dewey begins appearing at the breakfast table looking pale and exhausted, and once at five in the morning when Angela slips into his bedroom to borrow a cigarette she finds him gone and assumes he's spending his nights with other women. The discovery makes her feel both miserable and terrified. She dreams of filing for divorce and cleaning him out with demands for alimony. When he comes home they engage in the book's most vicious spat. He refuses to explain his absence and finally explodes. "You've bought and bought and bought. You've bled me dry. And now we're broke. . . . You're like all women—selfish. A man that marries one of you is a fool." At the end of the fight Angela makes a date for tea at the Biltmore with Jerry Wilder.

This homewrecker is the only character in *Children of the Ritz* who would not be out of place in Woolrich's later *noir* fiction. Wilder has clearly attained the insight of *Cover Charge* that after the dream comes the dying. When he pins a corsage of orchids and yellow roses to Angela's dress and she asks: "Must beautiful things like this *ever* die?" he replies with a single word: "Always," in the tone of one who "has seen many roses die in his time and knows there is no remedy." Woolrich tells us explicitly that Wilder seems to have "somehow captured and retained the great spiritual essence that men and women were seeking and scrambling for everywhere." He is detached and gentle and worldly-wise where Dewey is loud, ignorant and brutal. He has suffered heartbreak and been close to suicide more than once but has done with despair "what the oysters do when a grain of sand rubs them the wrong way, turned it into a pearl of wisdom." And he does love Angela. "I'd crucify myself for you," he says. One of the most perverse and inexplicable aspects of this novel is that he is supposed to be the bad guy.

By the end of his *tête-à-tête* with Angela at the Biltmore, they have reached an understanding. Since her mother and sister are going to sail for Europe that very night at midnight, she will go along with them, get a divorce in Paris, then come back to New York and freedom, and to Jerry if she still wants him. Dewey, who had listened in on an extension phone when Angela made her date with Wilder, senses what's in the wind and goes to his mother for advice. She tells him to stop whimpering and get physical. "What kind of a husband are you, anyway, letting her gad all over the town with some other man? Be asha-amed of yourself, be asha-amed." "I'm going to find her if it takes all night," Dewey vows. "I'll hunt from Harlem to the Battery and from the East River to the Hudson. . . . ." With the help of Woolrich Coincidence he finds them, and disposes of poor Wilder by the simple expedient of punching him in the eye. When he explains to Angela that he had taken a job as night cabbie to support her spendthrift lifestyle and was keeping quiet about it so as not to embarrass her, her love for him is rekindled on the spot, this time for keeps. In a conscious variation on the scene between Ruth and Naomi in the Hebrew Bible, leaving out God and the subjection of one person's heritage to the other's, "Your world is going to be my world," she whispers, "and my world yours." A few paragraphs later the novel ends on this impossibly romantic note, with the most interesting and appealing character in the whole two hundred and seventy-one pages lying on the sidewalk with a black eye and forgotten.

Much of *Children of the Ritz* is written in simple business English, with little of *Cover Charge*'s pretentious literary mannerisms but also little of its piercingly visual quality. The best of its evocations, however, are as vivid as a movie.

> By the time they reached the Queensboro Bridge it was already beginning to grow light. As the five o'clock sky became paler and paler the water underneath reflected it in dove color, broken here and there by blue ripples. Street lights on both sides of the river began to go out, whole rows of them at a time.
>
> You know the Corona, or the Bijou, as the case may be. It's the neighborhood motion picture house. . . . The Corona has an electric sign overhead at right angles to the sidewalk and the lights twinkle like ginger ale as the current is broken every fifteen or thirty seconds.
>
> [T]he lighted show cases seemed to fill the air with dancing golden sparks that hung like gleaming powder suspended over Broadway, while an endless current of people moved restlessly in opposite directions, gay people, their voices and their excited laughter and the surge of their feet rising in a majestic undertone to the open windows [of the high-rise apartment].
>
> Each street light as she was carried by it threw a silver mask over her face which quickly dropped below her chin and vanished as the wheels of the cab progressed.
>
> She stepped into the elevator cage and the glass screen slipped between them, shutting her off from him in a blaze of gold as she unwound her cape. . . .
>
> Driving back, the park was plum-blue now and its lights, when seen through the three transparent sides of the taxi, resembled white beads strung on invisible threads that hung suspended between earth and sky.

> It was one of those fleecy April nights with the pin-prick moon boring its way through eternities of silverish mist like a burning glass. The dirty harbor water glared like quicksilver. The . . . sky line . . . fluctuated as though seen through billows of smoke.

Even these moments, however, can't save this simple-minded commercial romance with its hokey sentimental fadeout. Perhaps Woolrich was just conforming to the taboos of *The Saturday Evening Post* and other slick magazines, or perhaps he was still dreaming that the broken marriage of his own parents could be healed as magically as the marriage of his protagonists.

Contemporary reviewers tended to dismiss the book as a sell-out. The *New York Times* accused Woolrich of "tempering the winds of his talent to the bleating lambs of public taste" and charged that this time he had "aimed low and kept his powder dry." Singled out for criticism were "the flapper having her wide and uncurbed fling but being all the time as virtuous as any mid-Victorian maid . . . and the saccharine, pollyannish climax."

If *Children of the Ritz* was a sell-out, at least Woolrich was well paid. At the end of April 1927 it was announced that the book had won the $10,000 first prize in the Campus Novel contest cosponsored by *College Humor* magazine and First National Pictures, the movie studio. Swanson loved the book and lobbied hard for it behind the scenes. "I made two trips to California within seven weeks," he writes in *Sprinkled with Ruby Dust*, "to try to implant some of my enthusiasm with the motion picture producers. I pumped up enough interest so that a movie deal appeared before the book was published. Woolrich was only twenty-one and had infinite promise." In fact he was already twenty-three, but who counts?

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During the four months *Children of the Ritz* was being serialized in *College Humor*, Woolrich's most recent short stories of the Jazz Age appeared in *McClure's*. Their substance was as trivial as his then current novel without even the flashes of superb writing which enlivened the book. "The Gate Crasher" (*McClure's*, August 1927) is at least historically important as Woolrich's earliest venture into first person narration. The protagonist is a $50-a-week Manhattan bank clerk named Ted Lawton, who resembles Alan Walker in *Cover Charge* insofar as each shares rooms with another young man. But Ted's roommate has little role to play in this tale, which focuses on Ted's habit of gate-crashing at debutantes' balls in the fanciest New York hotels. At one of these he meets and instantly becomes infatuated with the wealthy and lovely Joyce Nichols, but for obvious reasons doesn't reveal to her his own lowly social status. In a sense this story is a spin-off from *Children of the Ritz* but it develops in a completely different direction. Finding out that she'll be at a rooftop charity ball a few nights later, Ted crashes the party by shutting off the electric lights and slipping past in the darkness. But a comedy of errors leads to his being accused of filching a string of pearls from Joyce during the dance. She easily clears him but the situation forces Ted to tell her the truth about himself. Then, in a paroxysm of absent-mindedness, Ted forgets to return Joyce's pearls before leaving the ball and Joyce simultaneously forgets to ask for them. A surprised Ted finds the pearls later that night in his tuxedo pocket, and when he shamefacedly visits her Park Avenue mansion to give them back, love springs up between them anew.

"The Drugstore Cowboy" (*McClure's*, October 1927) is an even sillier concoction, its only historical interest being that it's Woolrich's earliest work to be set completely outside of Manhattan. In a small town in mid-America, happy-go-lucky lounger Jerry Jones accidentally meets and instantly falls for Betty Reeves, daredevil daughter of the richest family in the community. Woolrich did seem to be obsessed with rich girl–poor boy romances that year! Jerry sets out to make a name for himself in New York, promising to return for Betty in exactly one year. During that year she meets an overweight Lothario named Gordon Nye, who maneuvers her into an engagement. True to his word, Jerry returns on the anniversary of the day he left, announcing that in the interim he's become a fabulously successful pop singer. Betty leaves Gordon's ring under the doormat and drives into the sunset in her roadster with her one true love.

Before he published another word Woolrich too went off into the sunset, bound for Hollywood to watch First National Pictures make a movie out of *Children of the Ritz*. He went by train rather than roadster—as far as we know he never learned to drive a car—and he went alone.

CHAPTER THREE

Woolrich's time in the sun is shrouded in a pea-soup fog of obscurity. In *Blues of a Lifetime* he doesn't bother to mention having gone west at all. We know he moved to Hollywood in 1928, probably in the spring or summer, under contract with First National to work on the movie version of *Children of the Ritz.* We know that he went alone, and that he stayed on the West Coast until early 1931, when he fled back to New York and his mother. He continued to write novels, short stories, a stage play and an occasional magazine article while in California and he must also have made some money tinkering with the scripts of various movies, although never enough to justify giving him screen credit. Exposure to the film world probably helped develop his already evident talent for writing visually and taught him lessons in narrative drive and pace. And his involvement with the studios in the years of transition from silents to sound inspired several of his suspense stories of the thirties and later.

There were no new Woolrich novels published during 1928 and only four magazine pieces, a pair of stories and a pair of articles, all of which came out in the last five months of the year and apparently after he was settled in his new environment. The first and by far the best of these is "Mother and Daughter" (*College Humor*, August 1928), which deals with lovely peanut-brittle widow Georgia Gordon and her gawky, short-sighted, plain-faced daughter Jocelyn, known to one and all as Jicky. On the country club tennis court Jicky finally meets what seems to be Mr. Right in the person of handsome young Scotty Tryon—until this young man with the Fitzgeraldesque name is invited home to meet Jicky's mother and, at least to outward appearance, falls hopelessly in love with Georgia! As so often in Woolrich, however, the appearances are ridiculously deceptive, and in reality Jicky's mother is secretly engaged to a French nobleman. When Count Riano makes some cutting remarks about her age, Georgia begins a series of electrical rejuvenation treatments, but one day the machinery goes haywire and leaves her permanently disfigured, and her languid Count beats a hasty if graceful retreat. Afterward Jicky happens to encounter Scotty again and says a silent prayer: "Oh, God, make me beautiful in his eyes." God is good: Scotty still finds her lovely, or at least says he does, and they return to the Gordon home to reassure Georgia that she too is still lovely, or at least to fool her into thinking so. "A woman will believe what she wants to believe," says Scotty, though to himself alone, as the story ends. Our gratitude to H.N. Swanson for publishing it is tempered by amazement that he saw this most downbeat of Woolrich's pre-crime tales as fit material for *College Humor*.

"The Good Die Young" (*College Life*, October 1928) is another of the absurd concoctions which the young Woolrich whipped up for pin money, its main point of interest being that it's his first use of a woman narrator. The young lady in question, however, is such a naive wimp that one can hardly believe she's aware of the difference between the sexes. Tired of goody-goody domesticity, our Mary visits Manhattan in quest of deliciously wicked adventure and falls in with Edna, who pretends to be a Queen of the Safecrackers and sends Mary out to burgle a Long Island mansion. In reality Edna is the estranged wife of the mansion's owner, matinee idol Merry Dalton, and she plans to use Mary as a pawn in a divorce raid, complete with lawyer, cameraman and demand for $25,000 a year in alimony. Dalton of course falls instantly in love with the sweet lamebrain who visits him in the night, and Edna's scheme is thwarted at the last second by one of the wildest coincidences in the Woolrich repertory.

Sandwiched between these stories was the first of Woolrich's three published pieces of nonfiction, an eyeball-popping performance considering that it appeared in H.L. Mencken's legendary magazine for sophisticates, *The Smart Set*, and that ever since *Cover Charge* Woolrich's public image had been that of a knowing young devotee of the Jazz Age with all its works and pomps. In "Girls, We're Wise to You" (*The Smart Set*, September 1928) he strings together a whiny itany of complaints about Jazz Age females and demonstrates his supreme discomfort with the modern young woman, so free-spirited, so uninhibited, so unlike the "old-fashioned girl" he claims to prefer.

> The kind of girl that didn't wear bells on her garters and show them to you when you asked where the music was coming from. The kind of girl that didn't empty your cigarette case the first ten minutes after you were out with her. The kind of girl that didn't know where to get much better liquor than yours, and didn't criticize your gin and say, "Put it back in the lamp." The kind that didn't make four dates a night so she could keep the one that pleased her most and leave the others flat.
>
> I'm sick of girls like that. So are all my friends. I'm sick of legs. An ankle would be much more interesting for a change. Why do they have to show their thighs all the time? I'm sick of boyish bobs. Why don't they leave a little hair on their heads once in a while? Why don't they just be natural, instead of trying to be fast. A man knows a fast girl is just pretending. So why do they pretend to be something they're not? Can't they give us credit for a little common sense?
>
> Some day I'd like to meet a girl who doesn't start calling me by my first name five minutes after we've been introduced, who doesn't flirt over my shoulder the minute we get on a dance floor, who doesn't souse gin in a taxi and get it all over my trousers. . . . Some day I may meet a girl like that but if I do I think the shock will kill me. . . .
>
> They glory in their new freedom. Well, so do we in ours and it's a darn' sight older than theirs. We can't see ourselves marrying just to turn into good providers so some fluffy headed nit-wit can sleep all morning, dance all night, and stop worrying about where her next pair of silk stockings is coming from. . . . Marriage may be a partnership but it's not just a dancing partnership.

The article did not score a hit with female readers, and *Smart Set* received hundreds of blistering letters in reply. Sensing a juicy controversy, the magazine invited Woolrich to write another piece on the same subject and also commissioned screenwriter Hagar Wilde to set down her impressions of the contemporary young man. Both essays were published side by side under the same title, "I Know Your Line" (*The Smart Set,* November 1928). Woolrich's contribution is in precisely the same vein as his previous piece, a string of anecdotes about how girls come on to boys.

> There are the fast workers and there are ones who go slowly and get there just the same. There are the ones that begin calling you by your first name five minutes after they meet you. Occasionally they suffer a lapse of memory and call you by some one else's first name, but it's all in the game.
>
> But the slow ones are more deadly in the end. "Don't call me Myrtle. Why, I've only known you a week." And of course you think, "How girlish. How sweet. Now there's some one worth cultivating." Which is exactly what she wanted you to think. Their technique is that of the clinging vine, which as old as it is, has always brought results and always will.

The clinging vine, the tomboy, the good time girl, the vamp, th "gimme" girl, the gold digger, all are subjected to Woolrich's acid pen Finally, he says.

> I hope I haven't seemed too harsh on our little friends and playmates. The truth is, of course, that boys have as many different lines as the girls, and probably with a good deal less imagination and cleverness to back them up. But naturally I've only heard theirs second-handed from the girls themselves. Whereas I can judge plentifully of the lines girls string us fellows along with. So I say, as some one or other has said before me, no matter how thin you slice it, it's still boloney.

In these articles the *noir* tradition of cynicism toward women begins.

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During at least part of the time these stories and articles were in the publication pipeline, Woolrich was kibitzing desultorily on the First National sets where the movie based on *Children of the Ritz* was in production. The picture, released early in March 1929, was also entitled *Children of the Ritz.* Two versions were made available, one completely silent, the other with a music score and some sound effects, for the theaters equipped to handle those hybrid movies that were all the rage during the talkies' infancy. The film was directed by pedestrian workhorse John Francis Dillon (1887–1934) from a screenplay by Adelaide Heilbron. Starring as Angela was Dorothy Mackaill, who had played the female lead in First National's 1925 *Shore Leave,* the movie Woolrich had taken in at the Paramount the night before he learned that *Cover Charge* had sold. Dewey was played by twenties matinee idol Jack Mulhall. Richard Carlyle and Evelyn Hall were cast as Angela's stuffy parents, James Ford as her brother Gil and Aggie Herring as Dewey's mother. The movie's theme song, "Some Sweet

Day" by Nat Shilkret and Lew Pollack, was published as sheet music as a tie-in with the picture's release. As Woolrich Coincidence would have it, the song's title (but nothing else) is a close translation of "Un bel di," one of the most famous arias from Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*.

The critics were not kind to the picture. Dillon, said *Variety*, "worked uneventfully but capably with this scenario, which is a French farce photographed mostly outdoors and often in the driver's seat of an automobile." *Film Daily* was more sarcastic, saying that the movie was "[n]ot for an intelligent audience, but will please the flapper minds." What Woolrich thought is not on the record. What he contributed to the picture other than the source novel is also unknown, but his work didn't earn him screen credit. Indeed one of the strangest aspects of his stay in Hollywood is that in almost three years he never earned screen credit on any other picture either.

At least not under his own name.

Around the time Woolrich came to First National, the studio had taken on a director whose career is worth a paragraph of our attention. Danish-born Benjamin Christensen (1879–1959) had worked as an opera singer, a stage actor and director, and as an actor in early Scandinavian movies before making his debut as a film director in 1913. Within a few years he had become known as a specialist in the mysterious and macabre, with strong overtones of horror, cruelty and diabolism, a sort of cinematic soul-brother of Edgar Allan Poe. He made films in Denmark, Sweden and Germany before emigrating to the United States in 1926. After two films for MGM (*The Devil's Circus*, 1926, with Norma Shearer, and *Mockery*, 1927, with Lon Chaney), Christensen moved to First National, where he directed four pictures during 1928–29. The first of these was *The Hawk's Nest* (1928), a grotesque gangster melodrama of no concern to us here. Next he directed *The Haunted House* (1928), based on the stage play by Owen Davis, and starring Larry Kent, Thelma Todd and Edmund Breese. The titles of this film were credited to a certain William Irish. This was followed by *Seven Footprints to Satan* (1929), based on the novel by A. Merritt, and starring Thelma Todd, Creighton Hale and Sheldon Lewis. The titles of this film too were credited to William Irish. Finally, before returning to his native Denmark where he continued to make films until 1943, Christensen directed *The House of Horror* (1929), starring Louise Fazenda, Chester Conklin and Thelma Todd. On this one William Irish was credited as dialogue writer. Is it just coincidence that at the time Woolrich himself worked at First National, the studio's director of Poesque melodramas had an associate whose name was to become Woolrich's own best-known pseudonym a decade and a half later?

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In whatever time was left to him during 1928, Woolrich worked on his third novel, which was serialized in five issues of the Street & Smith pulp *Live Girl Stories* (November 1928–March 1929) as "Hollywood Bound" and which the Liveright firm published in hardcover in April 1929 as *Times Square.* It's a gritty, cynical and ironic book, somewhat akin to *Cover Charge* in its structural awkwardness and lack of a unified storyline, but with the artsy and precious mannerisms of his first novel replaced by the earliest signs of the narrative drive that was to distinguish his suspense fiction.

> She lost her balance, wailed with fright, and went over backward before any one could stop her. She dropped straight down to the shining dance floor beneath and rolled over and lay still. The sailors on the mezzanine tactfully fled down the stairs and out the back way, fearful of being arrested. The other girls up there screamed a shrill accompaniment to her fall and leaned over the railing to look down at her. Some who had been on their way down the stairs paused dramatically with one foot in advance of the other and their lips parted idiotically.

The injured taxi dancer, Terry Londres, is taken to Bellevue Hospital by a young man named Cliff Reilly. "If she'd had bobbed hair," the intern tells Cliff, "she would have fractured her skull. . . . The long hair cushioned the back of her head." The connection with Woolrich's diatribe against bobbed hair in "Girls, We're Wise to You" is not by chance. Cliff takes Terry home to the grimy brownstone flat on 68th Street which she shares with Marcella, a "jazz gamin" of the sort Woolrich detests. He leaves Terry $7.75 to replace her torn dance dress and asks for nothing in return but starts dropping in each day to see how she's doing and before long they're in love. One day when he calls and finds Terry out, Marcella makes a play for him which, again in line with Woolrich's views in the *Smart Set* articles, he rejects flatly. "When I want an invitation," he says, "I'll go looking for it." The next time he calls, Terry tells him they're through but refuses to give a reason. Three weeks later he sees her at the dance hall where they'd first met, and she explains that Marcella had told her Cliff had tried to bed her but that later she'd confessed that it was a lie and moved out. Instantly Cliff and Terry are together again. Although he can't afford to get married, they decide to share their poverty and move into a cheap flat at 215 Manhattan Avenue. One of their first purchases is a phonograph record whose lyrics seem to them to describe their life perfectly.

"You and I together all alone
In a little country of our own
Where the population's only two—"

When the little country is invaded by a third person, a middle-aged former suitor of Terry's who is now married and prosperous, Terry's relationship with Cliff begins to crumble, and before long she has left the cold-water flat to become the rich man's mistress. She tries to walk out on Cliff without saying goodbye but comes back to break it to him gently and they listen to "their song" for the last time. "Please, please think of me once in a while, Cliff," she begs. "No," he says, "if you're on one side of the street, I'll cross to the other. That's how much I think of you now." All this takes place in a single chapter of less than twenty-five pages.

In Chapter II we learn for the first time that Terry is an acrobatic dancer, with "bronze-red hair tumbling about her eyes," which are "the palest green imaginable, the green of opals or of silvery-gold limes." One of her performances, on a yacht in Long Island Sound, happens to be attended by exotic Hollywood movie star Desiree Vodiska, who is so impressed that she gives Terry her card and promises her some film work. Terry has her wealthy lover take her to see Vodiska's latest epic, which gives Woolrich the opportunity to evoke a typical twenties movie palace and a typical silent picture of the era with a wealth of loving detail, including title cards printed in the text. (Like the ones written for Benjamin Christensen's films by a certain William Irish?) Vodiska is scheduled to make her next few movies on the East Coast, at the Astoria studios which did a booming business in the late silent days. The picture about to go into production is called *Lily of the Ashcan* and deals with a cabaret hoofer who dances herself to death for love's sake. Vodiska insists on a double to do the strenuous dancing for her and arranges that Terry be hired for the job. After her dance sequence Terry is offered a contract with the studio, which means financial independence for her, and her thoughts begin to drift away from her married lover and back to Cliff.

Who is still living at 215 Manhattan Avenue. "The only thing that had kept him from getting out of there right after she had gone was that he hoped she might come back some day and if he left there they would never find each other again." When she gets in touch and asks him to visit her luxury high-rise apartment, he agrees. "He didn't want to see her again. But he went straight up there. He couldn't stay away." They begin seeing each other regularly, with Terry covering her evening absences by telling her lover she's been called back to Astoria for retakes. Eventually he catches her off base and kicks her out of the high rise. She moves into a two-room flat with a mercenary slut named Myra Kelly, who begins by borrowing money from Terry, then graduates to pawning some of her possessions on the sly, and finally decoys Terry out of the flat and tries to take off with everything her roommate owns in the world. Terry catches her in the act and throws her out. Terrified that Myra will come back with some violent men friends and get even, Terry calls Cliff for protection, and they walk the nightscape together. "Workmen were disemboweling the street for the new subway by the light of acetylene flares that threw the fronts of buildings into lurid blue relief." Terry asks Cliff if he still loves her. "Sure I do," he replies coldly. "Do you think I can turn it on and off like a faucet? It's there and it's there to stay. When I was born, I wasn't thinking about you, but some one's framed me so beautifully that when I'm dying I probably will be. And if you think I'm enjoying it in the meantime, you're crazy." He is love's fool, as hopelessly hooked by a worthless woman as any man in the dozens of 1940s movies which came to be known generically as *film noir.* Terry's late-night trysts with Cliff have cost her the job she had at the Astoria studio, but meanwhile Cliff has come into a $2,000 inheritance from an aunt, and Terry is moving back into 215 Manhattan Avenue as Chapter III draws to an end.

But if they can't live apart, neither can they live together with any happiness. Chapter IV describes their sordid existence while running through Cliff's legacy: nights guzzling bootleg liquor at one dive after another, days cooped up in the miserable hole they call home. "Tired, their blood running thin, their breaths acid, weighed down with despondency, sick of each other but unable to part with each other at any price." When not dancing or drinking, they fight. Twice he leaves her briefly, but each time he comes back. "What other place was there for him to go to? What other life was there? He told himself he wasn't meant to be alone that way. Even cups had their saucers and collars their ties." Eighteen years later Woolrich was to evoke a very similar couple chained to one another in his 1947 suspense novel *Waltz into Darkness.* The morbid suicide of a young man Terry had been flirting with on the side makes Cliff want to get out of New York for a while, so he and Terry pretend they're legally married and go to visit his maiden aunt in rural Pennsylvania, an environment in which they are a pair of fish out of water. A few days of boredom and they're back in the big city, reduced to paupery by the excursion. Cliff gets a job as sparring partner in a gym and Terry is rehired as Vodiska's stunt double. Now that they hardly see each other, their relationship improves nicely. Then one Sunday night, in an Italian restaurant in Greenwich Village, they run into a couple who are strangers to Cliff but whom Terry seems to recognize. As we quickly discover, the man is George Vasconcello, her wealthy ex-lover, and the woman is his wife Irene. When Vasconcello spots Terry he and Irene make a quick exit. Leaving Cliff behind, Terry manages to trace them to Grand Central Station and the Orange Blossom Limited. Sensing blackmail money if she plays her cards right, Terry abandons Cliff once again and makes a beeline for the gold coast of Florida.

Chapter V opens with Cliff alone and wretched. "I dread the dawn, when I awake to find you gone—" sings a tenor on the phonograph record that is the companion of his solitude. Terry has told him that the studio has ordered her to Florida for work on the next Vodiska picture, but when he happens to encounter Terry's former agent in Times Square and learns that Vodiska herself is still working at Astoria, he forces his way into the actress's luxurious apartment to find out the truth. At first Vodiska is upset and frightened by Cliff's incursion, but when she learns that his last name is Reilly, her reaction becomes unfathomable. In a clumsy flashback we discover that she is much older than she looks, that in her youth she had married a man named Reilly and had a son with him, that the boy had apparently died at the age of four or five when a German U-boat had sunk the passenger liner on which the family was traveling. Chronologically it's impossible, since Cliff is now twenty-four years old and must have been in his early teens at the time of the U-boat menace, but Vodiska convinces herself that this young man is her own miraculously alive long-lost son. In this plot development all the loopy events that dot Woolrich's suspense fiction are prefigured. Having no idea what's on Vodiska's mind, and torn apart by Terry's treachery, Cliff attempts suicide by jumping into the river at 120th Street but is saved by longshoremen.

The next two chapters follow Terry down in Florida, where she muscles her way into the Vasconcello house, demands money and free room and board from her ex-lover, and becomes pals with his wife Irene and with *her* lover, pianist Jimmy Gagan. All four wind up driving north together, with countless stopovers for booze parties. By the time they reach that favorite Woolrich setting, Atlantic City, each of the odd quartet has exploited, abused and made passes (heterosexual only) at the others in between drinking bouts. After Irene Vasconcello's hand is mangled in a drunken taxicab accident she is deserted by all her companions, Jimmy walking away with her money and valuables and Terry with her husband.

In the following chapters we're back in New York. Cliff calls on Vodiska at the Astoria studio to apologize for breaking in on her, and through his eyes we see how silent movies are made. Over lunch in her dressing room he tells her the story of his recent life, spiced with a few whoppers such as when he claims to have vague memories of being on a sinking ship in his childhood. Later the studio engages private detectives to shadow Cliff and trace his background, but Vodiska aborts the investigation by slipping a bonus to the P.I. agency with the understanding that its report will conform to her fondest desires. One is reminded of the line at the end of Woolrich's story "Mother and Daughter": "A woman will believe what she wants to believe."

In Chapter XI Vodiska goes back to Hollywood and awaits the report on the young man she has come to think of as Dream-Lad. When it comes, she sends a letter to Cliff, telling him that she's his mother and begging him to phone her long-distance. No sooner has he done so than she opens a $5,000 checking account in his name in a New York bank. Within a week he's blown the money on riotous living. With exactly twenty-eight cents left in his pockets, he's invited to yet another gin party, at an apartment on Riverside Drive opposite Grant's Tomb. After a few drinks he becomes dimly aware that something is happening to him. There's an interlude in which both Cliff and his hostess take turns insulting one of their guests who's homosexual. ("I bet he has ruffles on his underwear," Cliff sneers. "Lend me your powder puff, dear?" she drawls to the homosexual while they're dancing.) Then Cliff perceives that what is happening to him is called love. The woman's name is Virginia. "She did something to him. Just by being there. Just by being alive at all. Like a cold shower at 12 o'clock noon on a July day. Made him jump and tingle." They leave the party together, stroll through the park in the moonlight, walk back to her apartment in the Nineties where they spend the rest of the night, sexlessly. "I have found you," his heart tells him. "Now, at last—I have found you." When he leaves, "when the door had closed between them, it cut the world in half. . . ." He is in a state of exaltation.

> And every which way he turned, she was before him. Hundreds of her were there. She stepped down from the mirror, she stepped down from the window. In yellow tinsel she dropped gleamingly from the lights. In blue chiffon she materialized in the smoke of his cigarette. Sometimes she turned into Terry and sometimes she was herself. Sometimes she was the two of them, a Terry with a soul in back of her eyes, a Virginia bewitched forever into mute rigidity.

In no time flat he has touched Vodiska for another $5,000 gift, married Virginia in a Catholic church in Harlem, and installed her at 215 Manhattan Avenue, where they play an old record that goes "You and I together all alone—" and seems to them to describe their lives perfectly.

Chapter XIII shows us Terry, back in New York again, as she pays a sentimental return visit to the place she had shared with Cliff. No one's home, but Terry uses the key she had kept from the old days to let herself in, and finds the evidence that another woman is living there now. Enraged and heartbroken, she walks out.

Next comes the shortest chapter in the novel and perhaps the most crucial. Its sources can be traced back to a tragic accident that took place in 1923, on the set of a romantic Civil War movie, *The Howards of Virginia*, when a carelessly tossed match ignited actress Martha Mansfield's flammable celluloid hoopskirt and transformed her into a living torch. The incident seems to have haunted Woolrich, for he worked it into his fiction at least three times over a twenty-year period. In this earliest version, which is also the closest to historic fact, Vodiska in a celluloid hoopskirt is about to shoot a scene for a Civil War epic when an electrician tosses away a cigarette and she is instantly consumed by the flames.

In the fifteenth and final chapter, Cliff reads the newspaper headlines about Vodiska's death and knows that his golden goose is gone. Several weeks later, while using some letters of introduction Vodiska had written before her death in an attempt to land a decently paying job, Cliff comes very close to being hired by a certain Mr. George Vasconcello—until the magnate's latest wife, whose name used to be Terry, steps into the office, takes her husband aside and whispers a few words in his ear. Result: no job. In the book's final scene Cliff is near penniless again, working as a nightclub waiter to support himself and Virginia and their child. When Terry, who is now Broadway's brightest star, comes to the club to make merry with a party of celebrities, she snubs Cliff one last time and complains to the management that this insolent lout had tried to speak to her.

Reviews of *Times Square* tended not to be enthusiastic. The most favorable comment came from *The New Republic*: "Here you have the hard-bitten inhabitants of Broadway's night life presented with the breathless precision of a vaudeville skit. . . . The speed and lightness of the author are the only things that make the recital bearable." The *New York World* found Woolrich's plot "negligible" but conceded that "the incidents are clever and the characters well drawn . . . and the mad whirl of life of the denizens of Times Square is dramatically and faithfully reported." The reviewer for the *New York Times* disliked the book intensely: "Mr. Woolrich's conscious efforts to portray the lesser hangers-on of Broadway in a manner and style distinctively their own has resulted in a novel as tawdry and inconsequential as the people with whom it deals." The *Springfield Republican* gave Woolrich its third brickbat in a row: "The only thing in the book's favor is that it is not quite so trivial as the author's *Children of the Ritz*."

Certainly no one would call *Times Square* flawless. There are too many functionless scenes and characters, crucial information is conveyed again and again in the klutziest possible way, the Long Lost Son plot device is unintentionally farcical, and stylistically the book is nowhere near as vivid as Woolrich's previous novels. One suspects he had discovered Hemingway and was groping for an approximation of the master's laconic simplicity. But with the benefit of hindsight it's obvious that *Times Square* is within the bounds of *noir* fiction as that form was to develop under Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler and of course Woolrich himself. Indeed it's perhaps the earliest full-length treatment of one of the central *noir* motifs, a man's obsession with a woman who emotionally flays him. Add graphic sex and it would be a Cain novel. Add crime and suspense and it would be indistinguishable from Woolrich's work of the thirties and forties.

Late in the novel, Woolrich tries to evoke in third person the extent of Cliff's emotional enslavement.

> It was like a man praying to a statue and suddenly a shower of filth descends on both of them. What has any one but his idol? It was like lifting up a beautiful tile and finding a festering spider beneath. He had been so dumb; . . . so dumb and devoted. She could have told him that his own mother was no good and he would only have said, "Yes, your saying so makes her no good."

There, complete with overtones of masochism and religion, is the *noir* view of relations between the sexes. Thematically we are but a few short steps from Woolrich's masterworks.

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The only Woolrich short story published in the first half of 1929 was "Bluebeard's Thirteenth Wife" (*College Life,* February 1929), an impossible-to-describe hunk of junk which at least two people, Woolrich himself and the editor who bought it, seem to have thought was funny. We open with a sheik of Araby by the name of Mustapha Nuthar, who introduces a Jazz Baby into his harem, much to the displeasure of his other wives, whose names are Babl-Babl and Kah Feyar. The nail-on-slate style, half mock Biblical and half mock twenties slang, is packed with knee-slappers like "What thou hast said crowdeth thine bridgework." Late in the tale a visit is paid by the sheik's mother, one Hou Dou, who winds up shimmying in the seraglio to the strains of a jazz band on the radio. At least we can be grateful (may Allah who protecteth the cake eater from indigestion be thanked!) that Woolrich never perpetrated a mistake of this magnitude again.

Four months later the same magazine published the last of Woolrich's articles about the youth of the Jazz Age. The point of "We're Just a Lot of Smart Alecks!" (*College Life,* June 1929) is that the alleged nonconformism of the young is simply a new type of conformity.

> The whole thing has boiled itself down to a tradition. The first outburst of what they love to call flaming youth was more or

> less spontaneous; ever since then it has been pretty much of a profession. Ten years ago when Mary Jane went out on the back porch for her first drink, it was something new at least. Today you can see the same thing in any movie house for a quarter. . . .
>
> But we, as I have said before, are simply carrying on the tradition, and until we think of something else will continue to do so. The idea seems to be that as long as there has to be a reprobate younger generation, we may as well be it. And as long as a single preacher in his pulpit remains to be shocked, there will be some of us around to do the shocking. . . .
>
> Would any of the girls I know dare to begin knitting at a party? You bet not. And that, I think, would be about the only true test of emancipation left to us right now. . . .
>
> And are we really unconventional at heart? Certainly not. I know too much about ourselves. For all our beating of the tom-tom and our shrill cries of whoopee, we're bigger slaves to convention than the most Victorian Victorians ever were. We go about showing off with a sort of herd courage, because we know everyone else is doing it at the same time. But if tomorrow a sudden reaction were to set in, and the ukase went forth, "Be yourselves," there wouldn't be a spark of flaming youth left for miles around. . . .
>
> Why don't we all try reverting to before the war for a change? Drinking fruit punch at parties and dancing without stealing the routines of Harlem floor shows? . . . I think it's about the time the curtain came down on our act.

His best fiction of the Jazz Age is nowhere near so simpleminded, and his next short story, "Gay Music" (*College Humor,* January 1930), is one of his best. Its protagonist is named Gerry Jones but this is clearly not the same Jones who was in 1927's "The Drugstore Cowboy." Our new Jonesy meets a girl named Sharlee at a college dance after she has fallen into the gymnasium swimming pool. That night, on impulse, he marries her. The next morning he breaks the news to his mother, a New York socialite whose nickname, Angel Face, will recur several times in Woolrich's suspense fiction. Mother unangelically refuses financial help and the newlyweds are forced to migrate to Florida, where Jonesy gets a job leading the orchestra at an exclusive beachfront hotel. At this point we are introduced to the story's second glamorous middle-aged woman. Wealthy Zoe Werner falls hard for Jonesy, makes a play for him, and quickly reduces Sharlee to such misery that she's ready to go back to New York alone. Then, in the tale's most memorable scene, Jonesy while leading his orchestra suddenly envisions Zoe (whose name is Greek for life) as a putrid corpse—"There was no face there at all, only grinning, decaying teeth and the eyeless sockets and the worm eaten bridge of a nose"—and falls into a dead faint. Clearly we are in the presence of the specter of Anahuac that haunted Woolrich all his days and nights. For some inexplicable reason Zoe then decides to bow out gracefully, asking Sharlee to "tell him goodbye for me." As this bizarre story ends, Angel Face is about to visit Florida and dance to her son's music.

The stock market had collapsed in the fall of 1929 and the Depression's choke-hold on the country tightened in 1930, but you'd never guess it from any of Woolrich's fiction published that year. Indeed his next short story probably earned him more than any other of his youthful tales, since it appeared in *Liberty,* a glossy weekly second in word rates only to *The Saturday Evening Post.* "Soda-Fountain Saga" (*Liberty,* October 11, 1930) tells of John Spanish, a vain and handsome young man who dispenses refreshments behind the black marble counter of the ice cream parlor in the small town of Rockville Junction, and sets all the high-school girls' hearts aflutter. One day, when a woman more mature looking and aloof than the locals drops in for a soda, her invulnerability to the Spanish charm so unnerves the boy that he becomes captivated and even pays her check when she leaves without doing so herself. Spanish's jealousy of her cigar-chomping macho companion eventually leads him to spike the man's raspberry ice with castor oil. Thereby Johnny inadvertently foils the bank robbery which the man and woman had been about to pull. He becomes the town hero but his heart is broken, for he's lost his first true love.

Illustrated Love, a magazine sold by the thousands in the Woolworth chain of five-and-dime stores, published Woolrich's final story of the year, "Cinderella Magic" (*Illustrated Love,* November 1930). A farrago of coincidence brings eighteen-year-old Patty Moran out of her Shanty Irish ghetto and into an exclusive coming-out party at a Park Avenue mansion, where her simplicity and openness captivate blueblooded young Larry Pierce. The echo of the Vera Gaffney incident is loud and clear, and Larry is a true Woolrichian man. "He was young and nice, but his eyes were a little sad, as if he always expected to be disappointed, and always got what he expected." Although rich boy and poor girl are infatuated, Patty faces twin problems: she's afraid the Pierces and her own family will think her a fortune hunter, and she already has a regular beau who's mad about her. But the same openness and honesty that conquered Larry's heart also win over his mother and sister, and marriage plans are made, with the other boyfriend, crushed, walking out of Patty's life. Then at the last minute, realizing that to all the world she'll come across as a gold digger, Patty breaks Pierce's heart, calls off the wedding and sends for her former fiancé again. It's one of Woolrich's saddest love stories, with popular song lyrics like "Alice Blue Gown" and "Here we are, you and I, let the world hurry by" underscoring the theme that relationships and anguish are inseparable.

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Woolrich's fourth novel, *A Young Man's Heart,* was apparently rejected by the Liveright firm. How many other houses also turned it down we don't know, but it came out in November of 1930 under the imprint of the Mason Publishing Co., which was little better than a vanity press, and was reviewed almost nowhere. Yet it's as interesting as any of his early novels and its first half is as close to autobiography as his fiction ever got, although how much of the detail is factual and how much he made up will probably never be known.

Chapter One, "His Mother," opens with one of the best lines he wrote in his early output. "Blair heard the snap of the electric light, and the lining of his flickering eyelids turned vermilion." The scene is a large nameless metropolis south of the border which is clearly meant to be Mexico City, and the time is the early teens. A very young Blair Giraldy hears his parents returning to their hotel suite. Although the boy doesn't understand what's going on, they are quarreling bitterly over his father's affairs with other women. It's unlikely that Woolrich actually overheard such scenes as a boy, since he was only three when Claire and Genaro broke up, and nothing but the Russian sound of the name suggests that Claire might have been known as Sasha like Blair's mother in the novel. In any event, the elder Giraldy's unrepentant womanizing causes Sasha to leave him and go back to the States. Their parting scene includes some crucial dialogue that probably does reflect the first traumatic event in Woolrich's life.

> Sasha to young Blair: "He won't let me take you with me."
>
> Giraldy to young Blair: "—I'll make a man of you, what's more."

Woolrich shows his sympathy for the boy and his mother by surrounding them with religious imagery. ("All night the light of expiation had burned. . . ." "Then at last he was alone, crucified no longer to the fetish of appearances." "He went through his father's room and the sepulcher that had been hers until an hour ago. . . .") The first chapter ends with Sasha coldly rejecting her husband's pleas to stay as she boards the night train.

> The engine, lacquered and black as licorice, cast a satanic brick-red funnel of light ahead of it into eternity. Overhead gleamed the forget-me-not blue of the depot arc-lights hang-

> ing high as Babel from the beams, in long rows that began as big as full moons and ended the size of luminous peas. . . .
>
> Above her in the doorway appeared the grinning Juju mask of the carman, black flesh of Senegal torn over the aching world to Barbados. There was a crescent moon in the canal of open sky immediately above the tracks. Sasha's wish, the golden wish, the never yet fulfilled, the lode-star high above their heads: happiness, happiness. . . .

In Chapter Two, "Her Successor," the year is 1916 and Blair and his father are living in a house in Calle Bruselas. Giraldy in his bachelorhood has become a social lion, hosting a party almost every evening, entertaining his guests by playing the "black and neurotic" piano, "his ring dashing about over the keys like a mad jewel." Was the real Genaro musical like Woolrich's mother? We'll never know. A "rapturous young woman" named Estelle Fairchild seems to have moved in with the Giraldys, and Blair concludes that his father has remarried. At one of their parties Giraldy discovers that Blair has filched a cigarette and makes the boy smoke in front of the guests, who laugh uproariously until Blair is sick. We have no reason to believe that anything like this really happened, but it's certain that Woolrich in his middle twenties had nothing but contempt for his father.

Early in this chapter we are introduced to the novel's most important female character. Mariquita, a relative of the Giraldys' cook, is fourteen or fifteen years old, "cafe-au-lait, stockingless, red corals in her ears, her oily black hair plaited down her back." Her first conversation with Blair is on the subject of devils. "There are no devils," the boy tells her. This throwaway line is the only reference to early religious training in all of Woolrich's autobiographical fiction, but it's consistent with a statement in *Blues of a Lifetime* that prior to 1933 he had never been inside a church, and it suggests that Genaro was far from devout and had his son indoctrinated not at all or minimally. In any event, Blair and Mariquita enter into an intense presexual relationship, and in one scene she teaches him how to kiss. Whether the girl had a counterpart in real life is problematic, but some of the incidental details of Blair's life at this time, like seeing Pearl White cliffhanger serials on Sunday afternoons at the Parisiana Ciné, seem to be autobiographical. When a young Anglo child and her mother visit Estelle, and the child is sent out to play with Blair, a furious Mariquita lures the girl away, pelts her with dirt and sticks and stamps on her feet. Afterward Blair finds Mariquita hiding "in the tiled summer-kiosk on the half-moon of parkland facing the Argentine Legation," and they put their mouths to each other's ears in a foreshadowing of erotic play.

Then comes the rainy season, *tiempo de las aguas*, when every afternoon "the city and all the world received a merciless spanking of rain, coming down in crystal and silver rods that seemed to stretch unbroken between sky and earth. . . ." On one such afternoon Estelle sees or thinks she sees a lightning bolt in the form of a cross that strikes a coffee cup from her hand and blackens the spoon but leaves her unscathed. Terrified, she takes to her bed and refuses to eat. The next day she and the old cook go to church together. That night she leaves Giraldy's bed, and Blair is evicted from his own room and forced to sleep in the kitchen so that she'll have a private boudoir. The next night she fights off Giraldy's sexual advances, saying: "I belong to God." While trying to explain her religious experience to Blair—"It means you have found out more about yourself in one minute than in all the years of your life before"—she confesses that she and Giraldy are not married. Next day she gives the servants all her clothes and jewelry, and two black-veiled nuns "like apparitions of death" escort her from the house. "She has gone with the *religiosas*," Mariquita tells Blair. "One who goes in there, never afterward leaves." Giraldy celebrates his freedom with another party.

In Chapter Three, "His Friend," Blair is sixteen and his father's latest mistress, Mlle. Reynaud, suggests that Giraldy should remedy the boy's spotty education by sending him to school in Europe or the United States. The prospect of being torn away terrifies the boy.

> Things he had never taken notice of before suddenly became precious—the golden flood of sunshine, the apoplectic bougainvillea bursting over the tops of flaky pastel walls. . . . Here every stone, every tree, every surrounding, counted for something and could not be lightly given up. The old stone bridge astride the canal, whose arch coupled with its own reflection in the glassy water beneath to create a perfect oval, a transparent egg through which the blue sky shone. The mountain, "Our Lady of the Snows," whose white cone overlooked the city from the south, days away, yet in clear weather seeming close enough to reach out and touch. Countless old churches of the days of the viceroys, melon-pink in the noon sunlight, with rows of gray doves perched along their ledges. And the syrupy tolling of their bells, to tell the hours by. And the doll-like images that emerged from them on feast days to parade the streets, blue-robed and flower-crowned, borne beneath starry canopies in a galaxy of lighted candles. The orange trolley-cars with their green trailers crammed with Indians, gliding swift and bright between tall rows of eucalyptus trees, with little bleats of an electric bell at widely spaced crossings. And the rain that fell each day at just such and such an hour, blackening the

> glaring white of the streets and causing a perfume of crushed flowers and dead unburied things to rise in the air everywhere. All these things he knew and already loved, and felt he could not do without.

He senses that his father wants him out of the way so that he'll have a freer hand with women, and that he wants the boy to have to sail to Europe through the war blockade as a test of manhood. "At eighteen," Giraldy boasts, "I had already been through the Boxer War in China and was fighting headhunters in the Philippines." Genaro Hopley-Woolrich was somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years old in 1900 during the Boxer Rebellion, so this statement is clearly fiction. But Giraldy's contempt for his unmacho son seems to be drawn from Woolrich's personal experience, and so does young Blair's contempt for his father.

> A man to whom the height of youthful endeavor had been firing at brown and yellow peasants. A man who had no doubt overlooked all the beauty of a strange world, the temples and the sunsets and the moonlit waters, in his haste to be at some ill-famed house in the back alleys of Tientsin or Manila. A man who would send his son halfway around the world, to live among strangers in a land of rumbling terrors, to make room for a soiled mannequin. . . . To go away from here was like dying a little death before the time for death had really come.

That night he dreams that his father is aiming a rifle at him. When he tries to break the news to Mariquita, it's days before she understands that she won't see him again. The long paper ribbon of railroad tickets for his journey to the coast appears to him as "chains, bonds of exile." Not knowing what day has been set for his departure, he dreads each daily fall of darkness and only breathes again when that evening's train has gone. "I was so happy here," he writes on the wall behind his bed. The whole sequence of incidents prefigures the Death Wait sequences in the classic Woolrich suspense novels like *Phantom Lady* (1942) and *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1945). Finally Giraldy tells the boy that the time has come and he says goodbye to Mariquita in the kiosk near the Argentine Legation.

> Mariquita: "You will stay there. You will never think of me. You will marry there. Then it will be over."
>
> Blair: "I will never marry anyone else. . . . I will never love anyone else."
>
> Mariquita: "Until the end of your life?"
>
> Blair: "Until the end of my life."

He pledges his fidelity on the cross at the end of a chain of turquoise beads around her neck. "If you don't keep your word," she prophesies, "something terrible will happen to you. . . ." As Blair packs his suitcase and prepares to move out, Mlle. Reynaud prepares to move in. Having managed to overcome his dread of leaving this sun-drenched womb, Blair goes out to look at the sky for the last time.

> He crossed the patio, and it was quite dark now, and looked up and could see stars in the square black opening above him. . . . [T]he whole heavens seemed full of them. At the very bottom of the sky, in the west, a stripe of green, lengthwise like a snake, still marked where the light had last been.

Promising Mariquita once more that someday he'll return, Blair steps into the carriage with his father and is gone.

Chapter Four, "His Bride," begins as the first chapter began, with Blair opening his eyes. Seven years have passed, but Woolrich dismisses his interim life in a few phrases. He had been educated in New York rather than Europe (for reasons never made clear), had not wanted for money (thanks apparently to Sasha's affluent family), had never received as much as a letter from his father. Sasha had run a millinery shop but now seems to be dead. Twenty-three-year-old Blair has married Eleanor, a New York socialite, and they have come on their honeymoon to the city where he was a boy. "It's like a dream," says Eleanor of the vibrant environment she has never seen before. They are deliriously happy. "The aroma of the chocolate, the touch of l'Origan she bore cached behind the lobe of each ear, the unraveled lace that slowly escaped from Blair's cigarette, were all like incense to the little gods of felicity, exacting so little, bestowing so much." That night, "in the depths of the sapphire evening," with the sky "a mosaic of stars," they cling together as "that lode-star, as in his mother's time, seem[ed] to hang suspended over their heads: happiness, happiness. . . ." In a horse-drawn carriage they ride through the city's streets to Calle Bruselas, to the house where Blair and his father had lived. As they pass a sidewalk café the musicians are playing "Poor Butterfly," a song which was to become a leitmotif in one of Woolrich's most famous suspense stories, "Dime a Dance" (1938). Men and women on the boulevards stare in awe at Eleanor's golden blonde beauty. When they reach Calle Bruselas Blair shuts his eyes "as though to recapture some long-lost dream," and when he opens them "the moon, like a beacon directly overhead, had strewn a lane of blue-white powder down the center of the glistening macadam roadway." Caring nothing about his father—"Giraldy was only a shadowy excuse for coming near here at all"—but obsessed with reentering the dream life of his past, Blair leaves Eleanor in the carriage and goes into the house. Its present occupants know nothing of Giraldy and his French mistress except that he had left years ago and "said he was going to the opal mines of Queretaro to do some business. . . ." It's the book's only reference to what Blair's father does for a living. When he and Eleanor leave in the carriage, his dream is behind him again.

In the next forty-odd pages, spanning the rest of this chapter and much of Chapter Five, "Her Admirers," Woolrich goes into excruciating detail about the social life and sartorial fashions in fancy Latin American hotels. Rafael Serrano, a lounge lizard who happens to be a diplomat attached to the Argentine Legation, begins an intense flirtation with Eleanor, to which she responds in kind. They stay on at the hotel for four months, Blair because the country is his dreamland, Eleanor because she revels in being admired by hordes of Latin men and by Serrano in particular. "Here she had found a shrine waiting for her and she had stepped into it." This aspect of the book comes to a head on a Saturday afternoon when Blair, Eleanor, Serrano and several others take a glistening water taxi to the exclusive Jockey Club, "on an island is the middle of a lagoon. . . . which was like a huge open goblet of chartreuse. . . ." Blair becomes violently ill when Eleanor and Serrano flirt openly at lunch. That evening, with darkness "creeping out of the earth" and the western sky aflame, "faint bands of yellow interspersed with pearl gray, like the markings on some dragon-snake of Chinese mythology, glowering across the heavens, threatening to devour the world," the launch takes off without Blair. "The carmine light at the stern was skimming over the licorice-black water, it was already far out on the lagoon." Eleanor and Serrano have been off somewhere together and missed the launch too. The three have to return in a later boat with each other for company.

> The intervening water, broadening every instant, was incandescent with streaks of fluid light, reflecting the brilliantly glowing casino upside down in a rippling pool of gold and silver glass studded with living coals of vermilion and phosphorous-green. High above this fever-sore of heat and color the stars, cool and remote, were like white flowers in a great black meadow. . . .
>
> They had entered the canal, and the unseen, unfelt lily beds so cruelly parted to give them passage, that floated slowly together again on dismembered pods in their heaving wake, retaliated by filling the air with an evil smell of death and rottenness. And over it all the stars were as beautiful as sin.

That night Eleanor shrieks hysterically at Blair that she's in love with Serrano. Blair covers his ears in agony and moans.

These "travesties on human conduct" are interrupted by something with which Woolrich's childhood in Mexico had made him intimately familiar: a revolution. First there are rumors of unrest and military mutiny, followed by frantic troop movements through the city, followed by a flurry of arrests and summary executions and the cutting of telegraph lines. When the first refugees from the countryside reach the metropolis, hundreds of foreign visitors scramble madly to get away. Each departing train is a chaos. Soon only a handful of Anglos are left, Blair and Eleanor among them. When Blair suggests that they too should leave, Eleanor subtly accuses him of being a coward, and remembering how often his father had called him that, he explodes at her. Serrano graciously offers both of them the safety of the Argentine Legation, only a few blocks from their hotel, in case of violence. Blair comes close to hinting that Eleanor has her own reasons for wanting to be inside the Legation but holds his tongue. When the families of the country's rulers make their exodus in private railroad cars, and the city is plagued by food hoarding and skyrocketing inflation, Blair and Eleanor know it's time to get out, but each delays for personal reasons and they reach the railroad station too late. The revolutionaries have dynamited the tracks. They return to the hotel, unpack and, in an atmosphere of impending doom, dress for dinner. During the soup course the hotel dining room goes dark: the rebels have seized the power station. In the depth of the night they hear machine-gun fire, a metallic clatter like the sound of riveting, and in the morning they find that the insurrectos have taken over not only the hotel but the entire city.

Chapter Six, "Himself," begins with a sketch of the mighty rebel general Heronimo Xavier Jesus Maria Palacios, who has turned the hotel into his headquarters. The evocation of Palacios and his entourage of gunmen, spies, cooks, whores and hangers-on is on a par with the attitude toward revolutionaries in Woolrich's later South American adventure tales.

> The patio, though it presumably remained open to all guests alike, became no more than an annex to the general's quarters, ornamented at all hours of the day by the lounging, expectorating figures of members of his bodyguard, who sat sprawled in chairs, with their naked rifles over their knees and their feet provocatively extended out before them so that anyone wishing to pass had to pick their steps and edge aside. Bestially indifferent to or else actually ignorant of the existence of bathrooms, they sought carpeted corners, regard-

> less of who might take their way down the corridors. The hotel, to those who had been compelled to remain in it, became a loathsome inferno.

The soldiers stare at Eleanor with a mixture of hostility, mockery and menace, like "a cage of tigers or savage apes with the bars let down. . . . At times she would have liked to run amuck among them with a riding-whip, so that they would never dare look twice at her again." Then she happens to pass through a hotel corridor at precisely the same moment as the repulsive Palacios, and the stage is set for the novel's climax.

The general sends a "mongrel officer" to the Giraldys' suite with his compliments and an invitation, which is not optional, that they join him for dinner. Knowing precisely what Palacios wants, Blair is "between the devil and the deep sea" since the only way he can protect Eleanor from the general is to ask help from Serrano. The Argentine diplomat agrees to prepare safe-conduct passes for both of them and to wait by the phone so that he can deliver them on a moment's notice. Then Blair and Eleanor go down to dinner, which in the absence of electricity is served in the glare of detached automobile headlights.

> Every grain of dust floating in the air became visible, and as a result a constant rain of blinding electric snowflakes seemed to be falling. . . . The rouge under [Eleanor's] eyes, so sparingly applied at all times, had gone purple. . . . The faces of the men looked like skulls stripped of their flesh.

For Blair the world has become "a vast desert in which he stood erect stretching forth his arms toward mirages." Palacios uses a ridiculous pretext to take Eleanor into a private room with him. Blair, surrounded by armed rebels, is approached by the camp follower who had been at Palacios's side, a dark and vicious-looking whore in a pink chiffon shirtwaist, "nude beneath her cobwebby garment in the bright glare of the lights." Who is she? "I am Mariquita," she says. Score one more point for Woolrich Coincidence. Blair is unmoved and refuses to acknowledge her. "It is not that you have forgotten," she reproaches him, "it is that you don't wish to remember. . . . Thus you went away and thus you have returned. They do well to hate your nation. Frozen, blue-eyed statues—" Eleanor reappears, wrapped in a magnificent white shawl which Palacios wants to give her and she like an idiot wants to accept. When Mariquita interferes, Palacios strikes her across the mouth. Eleanor and Palacios vanish again, leaving Blair and Mariquita alone. "She does not know the meaning of love," Mariquita tells him, making it plain that she herself does. "You were the dream that shone before me by night. You were my Satan and my

Christ. . . . I had never forgotten you." She follows Eleanor and Palacios offstage, saves her rival from the general's lust and gives her the chance to reach a phone and call Serrano. During the wait for the safe-conduct passes, Blair and Mariquita stand together.

> Blair: "Mariquita, you did this for her?"
> Mariquita: "No, for you. Well do I know how you love her."

When Serrano arrives and Blair and Eleanor are about to leave with him, Mariquita throws her arms around her love. "Do not go with her! Do not leave me like this—never will I see you again!" Palacios shoots her on the spot and she falls dying to the floor.

> Palacios: "Ask him now to bring you back to life."
> Mariquita: "My dream of you is now forever."

Refusing to leave and save himself, Blair kneels down and takes Mariquita in his arms. "Little friend, don't be frightened. We'll be happier some other day." Then, turning to Palacios, who is towering over him, "tall as God, breathing wrath," he cries out: "Swine! what are you waiting for?" Eleanor and Serrano, on their way to safety together, just miss hearing the general's second shot as the novel ends.

In another time, in the age of Verdi, Bizet, Puccini, *A Young Man's Heart* might have been hailed as the perfect libretto for an opera. But it found very few readers in the Depression-shrouded years of 1930 and none at all since. Nevertheless its autobiographical roots are as tantalizing today as ever, and its intense emotional excesses demonstrate that Woolrich's *noir* fiction of the thirties and forties was by no means the beginning of his obsession with the maniacal power of love. Like countless others of his novels and stories, it could with perfect propriety have been entitled *First You Dream, Then You Die.*

A month after its appearance, Woolrich did something that the male protagonists had done in all four of his novels to date but that no one who knew him at all well would have expected him to do himself. He asked a woman to marry him.

CHAPTER FOUR

Woolrich had loved the movies most of his life and there had always been a strong cinematic quality to his prose. If he were to marry at all, it may have struck him as fitting that he should become the son-in-law of one of the industry's founding fathers.

Sometime between 1868 and 1875, depending on which source you prefer, J. (for James) Stuart Blackton was born in Sheffield, England. Like hundreds of thousands of others, including Woolrich's maternal grandfather, Blackton emigrated to the United States as a young man to seek his fortune. He was hired as a cartoonist and reporter by the *New York Evening World*, was sent to Menlo Park, New Jersey, to interview Thomas Alva Edison and wound up becoming the subject of one of the Edison studio's early minifilms, *Blackton the Evening World Cartoonist* (1896). Seeing huge possibilities in the making and marketing of such films, Blackton quit the *Evening World*, acquired his own primitive motion picture camera, which was called a kinetoscope, and in 1897, in partnership with two other transplanted Englishmen (Albert E. Smith and William T. "Pop" Rock), founded the Vitagraph Studio. The new Brooklyn-based company was soon cranking out so many pictures—mostly animations and genuine or faked newsreeltype items, each only a few minutes long—that Edison's virtual monopoly of the business was shattered. By 1910 Vitagraph was considered second only to the Biograph studio, where the one- and two-reel films of a newcomer named D.W. Griffith, building on the work of Blackton and other pioneers, were literally creating the language of the movies. Blackton himself had become a millionaire by then; indeed he was one of the first movie millionaires to adopt the Grand Mogul lifestyle one associates with Hollywood tycoons. He spent about $300,000 on the construction and adornment of Harborwood, a lavish Italianate mansion at Oyster Bay, Long Island, where his nearest neighbors were Theodore Roosevelt and Louis Tiffany. In his prosperity he became an avid yachtsman and speedboat racer, threw huge parties on board his steam yacht *Sagamore*, was appointed Commodore of the Atlantic Yacht Club and thereafter preferred to be addressed by his naval title. When World War I broke out in Europe, he secured backing from some munitions manufacturers and militaristic jingos (including Teddy Roosevelt) and produced *The Battle Cry of Peace* (1915), an elaborate propaganda film designed to scare audiences into supporting American "preparedness" for entry into the war. After the Armistice he moved his family and production facilities to England and made a number of feature pictures. Perhaps the most notable of these was *The Glorious Adventure* (1922), starring Lady Diana Manners and an ex-soldier named Victor McLaglen, which was shot in a new process called Prizmacolour and is credited as the first all-color movie ever made. Soon after Blackton relocated to California in 1926, the Vitagraph company was bought out by Warner Brothers. He lost most of his money in the 1929 stock market crash and died in obscurity in 1941.

Blackton had had a daughter, Marian (b. 1901), by his first wife. His second marriage, to a former Vitagraph actress, produced a daughter, Violet Virginia (1910–1965), who was known to everyone as Gloria or Bill, and a son, Charles (b. 1913), who became a history professor at Colgate University. As a child Gloria had appeared in the so-called Country Life Series of one- and two-reel films, produced by her mother and shot on the Harborwood estate. As a teenager she had had a small role in *The Glorious Adventure* and had played Queen Elizabeth's lady-in-waiting in her father's production of *The Virgin Queen* (1923). Later she had written a few romantic tales which were apparently published in love pulps. At age twenty she seems from photographs to have been attractive if a bit plump.

She and Woolrich met in Hollywood but we don't know precisely when. A feature story about them in the *Cleveland* (Ohio) *Plain Dealer* for July 9, 1933, claims that it was while Woolrich was "supervising production" of the movie *Children of the Ritz*. But in view of the fact that Woolrich's work on that picture was on a much less exalted level, and of the other facts the feature writer got wrong (he says for example that Blackton's *The Battle Cry of Peace* was a *pacifist* propaganda film, credits Woolrich with a nonexistent novel entitled *Cocktail*, and asserts that *Cover Charge* came out *after Children of the Ritz*), we trust his unsupported word at our own risk. More likely Woolrich and Gloria met sometime in 1930. The *Plain Dealer* accurately described Woolrich as a "precocious, sensitive and strange young man . . . pale, delicate-looking . . . who rarely before had been known to seek the companionship of women," and whose life "had been extremely ascetic, detached from the world about him." Gloria is depicted in the article as "life-loving" and "vivacious," and the Odd Couple nature of their courtship is captured vividly.

> It was Gloria who handled the wheel—Woolrich who sat quiet, detached—as they sped through the countryside in his expensive roadster. At the beach it was Gloria who dove into the crested rollers of the Pacific and swam far out in a glistening path, while Woolrich remained up on the sands, idling in the shade of a bright beach parasol. At the popular Cocoanut Grove night club it was Gloria who swirled gracefully with different partners upon the dance floor, while Woolrich preferred the role of a looker-on.

Suddenly, and apparently out of the blue, Woolrich asked this vivacious and life-loving twenty-year-old to marry him.

Two and a half years later, Gloria described his proposal for the reporter from the *Plain Dealer*. "How did it come about? It was the unusual way in which he proposed to me. He sat two feet away from me on a couch and asked me to be his wife. You could have bowled me over. It was such a detached proposal—really unique, in contrast with the usual Hollywood pawing tactics. I'm romantic, you know, and when I began to believe that Cornell really revered me in a spiritual way I was deeply touched. Honestly, it swept me off my feet."

Woolrich and Gloria were married by a city judge in Santa Ana, about forty miles southeast of Los Angeles, on Saturday, December 6, 1930. Contemporary newspaper clippings mention a forthcoming honeymoon in Hawaii, but as we'll see, there wasn't one. After the ceremony the couple drove back to Los Angeles, with a stop en route so that Gloria could phone ahead and break the news to her father. "When we returned to Hollywood," she later told the *Plain Dealer*, "and I was washing the car in the garage, Dad drove up. He said: 'You're a bad girl. Why didn't you let me know about all this in advance?' But when I told him the whole thing had been on the spur of the moment, he wasn't sore."

What J. Stuart Blackton privately thought of his strange new son-in-law can only be conjectured. Gloria's brother Charles, then seventeen years old and preoccupied with high school athletics, saw Woolrich just a few times and concluded, so he told me in 1987, that the man was "a jerk." Within three months the marriage was dead and Woolrich had moved back to 239 West 113th Street and his mother.

The only mention of Gloria in *Blues of a Lifetime* is in the paragraph dealing with the three times he had loved women. The first time, as we know, the woman was Vera Gaffney. "The second time," he tells us, "somebody else married her, and it was only after it happened that I realized I wished it hadn't." Whoever this second woman was, or whether she existed at all, remains a mystery. "The third time," he goes on, "I married her, and it was only after it happened that I realized I wished I hadn't." This woman is Gloria. What went wrong with the marriage?

The *Plain Dealer* account of 1933 is discreet, attributing the breakup to the fact that Woolrich "loved his wife too well to kiss her," suggesting that he was "so wrapped up in dreams that he . . . had little time for the rich realities of life," that "the world from which he drew his inspiration . . . was merely a fountain of ideals, not a personal actuality." This gibberish could mean almost anything, but Gloria's quoted statement that she believed Woolrich revered her in a spiritual way ties in perfectly with the attitudes toward women and love and sex that the Woolrich of *Blues of a Lifetime* claimed had been instilled in him by Vera Gaffney on the bench in Morningside Park opposite a Catholic church. The article's veiled suggestion that his marriage was never consummated is in fact the truth.

Gloria died long ago, but her elder half-sister Marian, who was also her closest confidante, is still alive and in her eighties today. In September 1977 I taped an interview with her in her Pasadena apartment and learned as much about that brief, inexplicable and disastrous marriage as we are ever likely to know. Her vivid word-picture deserves extensive quotation.

> I can't really remember first meeting Cornell . . . But I know that I was stunned when I saw him, because he was a very frail and pathetic-looking person, very shy, very withdrawn, and he didn't seem to want to reveal himself at all.
>
> My sister had, I think, a very strong streak of the maternal feeling in connection with her romances always. I had a touch of it myself. My first marriage was based on the fact that I felt a mother's desperate concern for this man that I married, which was a disaster.
>
> But at any rate, Bill [Gloria] fell in love with him very rapidly, and it was quite obvious that he wasn't especially

interested in her. He didn't really seem to be interested in very much. He told us very little about himself. . . .

But I sensed in him a very deep intelligence, and I was curious about him, I wanted to know him. Any attempt that I would make to discuss his work or anyone's work with him he would shy away from, he would avoid. But there were times when he and I had exchanges of hilarious humor and wit. We seemed to spark each other, and it was zany, and it was great fun.

This he never shared with my sister. She would join in the gaiety, and people would laugh like mad at us, but then suddenly he would turn off. He was, as I say, a recluse even in the presence of other people. To my mind he also seemed to be not observing or listening or paying the slightest attention, but we found out that we were wrong, in a very dramatic fashion.

The elopement was a great surprise to me. I really hadn't felt that he was at all interested, and as it turned out, he was not. . . . The [supposed honeymoon] trip to Honolulu is pure fantasy. They went to some wretched place not far from Hollywood and he insisted upon taking with him a young couple whom my sister disliked rather strongly. . . . And, well, I understand now why. There was not any honeymoon. The marriage was never consummated. . . .

Bill was very puzzled by it all, and when she came back, she said: "I want to talk with you, but I can't quite do it, not yet. Well, I'll talk to you later about it all." But she said: "It wasn't very much fun."

. . . . [W]hen they returned from the honeymoon . . . my father was in the garage, which was under the house up in the Hollywood Hills, and with him was my half-brother, Bill's full brother, Charles. . . . They came sheepishly up the driveway and my father just looked up. He was getting together his camping equipment, which he kept in excellent shape, and we were all going on a camping trip, up, I think, to Lake Arrowhead. And he just looked up and said: "Well! Greetings!" They stood there, and Charles said: "Hello." I was at the top of the steps, and I said: "Yoo-hoo!" And then I turned and went indoors, and Charles went back to what he was doing, and my father went back to what he was doing. They just stood there. So finally I opened the door, and they were all in this sort of tableau, and I said: "Come on in!" And they came upstairs.

Then after a bit, when my father had finished what he was doing and Charles had, they came up and we had a very brief

> talk, and then Cornell stood up and said: "Well, I think we'd better go." We didn't ask them where they were living or anything about it. We just acted as if they had gone off for a little ride and come back. So then Bill said to me: "We have an apartment at La Belle Tour, and you must all come over."
>
> Well, my father never went there. It wasn't that he felt any animosity about it, he just wasn't interested. He never was interested in Cornell anyhow. He didn't care about him particularly. I liked him.

Marian did visit Gloria and Woolrich at their apartment, and the three frequently went to the beach.

> I don't think my sister had a snapshot or a picture of Cornell. I never did. We were all ardent snapshot fiends. . . . But he would always make it a point not to be in the picture. He was very adamant about it. And I could understand why he would not at the beach, because he did not cut a particularly heroic figure in a bathing suit. He was, as you know, a very skinny chap.
>
> But otherwise, in his rather loose sports clothes and street clothes, he was an attractive figure. He was a homely chap but there was something very attractive about him, very boyish, very appealing. You had the feeling you wanted to take him on your lap and say: "There, there." He was just one of those strange people, but I knew that there was a brain there. . . .
>
> They weren't very long in La Belle Tour, in that apartment. They had one party that was sort of a mishmash, it didn't go very well. My sister could only take very little in the way of drink. I had a pretty good strong head for it, although I wasn't drinking heavily, but I drank a fair amount. My sister would be ill after three drinks. And I never saw Cornell do very much drinking. Yet he talked drinking much more than he did it. So time went by, and I would see them occasionally, and they had this, as I say, this party that wasn't a great success. Then I think we had them up to dine with us, just once.
>
> And then Christmas was coming to be with us, and Santa Claus was just round the corner. And we were getting ready for our—. We were pretty broke at the time, the Blackton family. . . . But one morning my sister drove up and came into the house. I was alone there. And she looked at me, and suddenly she flung herself on the couch and burst into tears and said: "He's gone. Cornell's gone." And she began to tell

> me that things had been very bad then, that she was . . . [still] a virgin. . . .
>
> [I]t was a blow to her that there wasn't anything to the marriage in the physical sense, but [also] that he had left her, because she still felt this great, warm and loving feeling for him. She was still in love with him, and she was heartbroken.
>
> But what hurt her, I think, more than anything else was the great mistake he made in leaving a diary. A large leather-bound diary, a looseleaf arrangement. It covered the period from the time when he came to Hollywood until just before he left. . . . [H]e said many uncomplimentary things about our family, about Gloria and about all of us. . . . But he also spoke in this diary of the thought that it might be a really good joke to marry this Gloria Blackton. I think that bit into her more than anything that he wrote. I mean, she overlooked the grosser part of the diary. . . .

The bulk of the diary, Marian told me, recounted a large number of homosexual encounters, in "sordid and dreadful detail." Neither she nor Gloria were very knowledgeable about homosexuality but Gloria knew enough to connect the accounts in the diary with the mystery of Woolrich's private suitcase.

> Bill had wondered about this suitcase that he had, that he kept locked. She wasn't a person who pried into anything, but one day he left it open by mistake, and she could see that there was a sailor suit in it. And he would don the sailor suit, get up in the night and leave her. In the dark he would put on the sailor suit and go down to the waterfront and find whatever experience he was looking for. . . .
>
> [Bill] was fully three weeks in getting over it before she could be back to normal. For a while we couldn't listen to any rendition of "Body and Soul" or any of those songs without Bill clutching the furniture and breaking down.

Had Woolrich *wanted* his secret to be discovered? Was it purely by oversight that he had left that suitcase unlocked, forgotten the diary when he packed up and walked out of the marriage? Clearly his homosexual life was of the most furtive and sordid variety, a side of himself that he despised and was ashamed of, that he could neither accept nor suppress, that he never acknowledged publicly and dropped down the memory hole even in *Blues of a Lifetime,* which he claimed to have written for himself alone. How many of the young women he mentions in his autobiography were really young men?

There seems little reason to doubt that his homosexuality was one major aspect of the malignant fate by which he felt himself singled out. The contempt for "perverts" that surfaces on occasion in his fiction is on a par with his contempt for cowards: both are rooted in contempt for himself.

He must soon have realized that the time bomb he had left ticking away in Hollywood could easily destroy him. Not long after his departure, Marian Blackton Trimble told me, there came

> a wild letter from Cornell, begging [Bill] to return the diary instantly. My father suggested that she hold the diary. He said: "I'm not suggesting that you use it." And she said: "I never would, because, as you know, I can have this [marriage] annulled." . . . Bill immediately said: "Of course I'll send it on." She was very decent about the whole thing, and then immediately saw to it personally that it was sent to Woolrich, and that was the end of that.

No trace of such a diary remains among Woolrich's papers.

Why did he propose to Gloria in the first place? Two possible reasons suggest themselves: as a sick joke, or to provide cover for his secret life. Why did Gloria say yes to him? At the end of our interview Marian spoke to that issue.

> That he was uncommunicative, that there was something extremely sad about him, that I felt deeply, and I think my sister did. I think that was one of the things that attracted her to him. She wanted to mother everything. She and I were both that way, we were forever bringing back lost animals and hurt birds and hurt people. Anyone in any trouble, no matter how difficult our financial situation was, we would take them under our wing and look after them and do the best we could for them.

Perhaps a third reason he married Gloria was that he couldn't live without a mother. And for the rest of Claire Attalie Woolrich's life, except for two brief periods on his own, he didn't.

• • •

Woolrich's fifth novel, *The Time of Her Life*, was published by the Liveright house in mid-February of 1931, during the last stage of his marriage and only three and a half months after the Mason firm had issued *A Young Man's Heart*. This is by all odds the least rewarding of Woolrich's early books, a Jazz Age rendition of the Cinderella myth replete with mawkish and leaden-footed writing and the weakest of excuses for a storyline. Its interest for us lies almost exclusively in its links with his other novels and his life.

Chapter One is a sort of prologue, set on a single evening in June of 1902 and focusing on the life of Florence Foy, "that gayest figure of the First Decade, the grass widow." We learn from a series of offhand remarks that she was married three years before to someone named Glenn, that they've been separated for six months, that she is living with her father in a spacious private home in Manhattan, that her social life alternates between gay outings at high-toned restaurants and quiet evenings at home playing double Canfield, that she is "used to having her way," that she looks tired and is plagued with headaches and other ailments which she's determined to ignore. As the novel opens she is turning down the gas lamps in her bedroom and waiting to be picked up by a hansom and taken to Reisenweber's restaurant on Columbus Circle by her current beau, Dick Bannon. "They passed the first lamppost and a splash of its apple-green reflection fell on the floor of the carriage, travelled upward until it had found their faces, and then was gone." At the restaurant, during a between-course dance, Florence falls to the floor in a dead faint. A doctor brings her around and tells Bannon she's going to have a baby. It's the end of all hope that the man will marry her. They leave the lifeless restaurant after 3:00 A.M. "Emerging, they found the Circle deserted, rimmed with chartreuse-green gasposts in two sweeping lines that made it seem vaster than it was, emptier than it was, the column in the center rearing itself faintly white against the night sky." Knowing that her carefree grass widow days are over, she vows to name the baby Paul after her father. "And oh, I'll learn to love you so," she silently promises her unborn child. "I'll have to love you, to keep myself from remembering all I've given up for you." The baby turns out to be a girl—a less affluent version of Angela from *Children of the Ritz,* and more of a stand-in for Woolrich himself.

Most of the book takes place between the last day of 1920 and the last of 1921, and our viewpoint character is Pauline Foy in her late teens. She lives with her mother in a small apartment. She doesn't seem to be in school or to have a job and her mother apparently doesn't work either. A throwaway reference to the securities Grandfather left them is the only hint as to how they survive. Eighteen-year-old Pauline is brimming with life and "would have liked each day to start with a brave show of drama" but has been smothered under a rigid domestic dictatorship, forbidden to wear rouge or lipstick, ordered to come home early every evening, made to feel guilty if she violates (as she often does) any of the rules of the house. This situation is intolerable to her.

> Oh anything, but not this. Not this cloying tyranny of love. . . . "[I]f only I knew there was one hour in twenty-four I could call my own, all my own, not to say what I had done, not to say where I had been, not to say whom I had seen, not to hurry home and explain away."

Her mother wants Pauline to accompany her to a dull family New Year's Eve party in Montclair, New Jersey, but Pauline is determined to go to a *real* party with her friend Lulu, whose voice is "a wail like the G string of a violin" and whose face is a "mask of white powder with a pink smudge on each cheek bone." The girls conspire to extract Florence's permission by pretending that the hostess who's invited them is a dear friend of Lulu's mother and the quintessence of decorum, though in fact she's a stranger to them both. Having succeeded so far, Pauline then has to pretend she doesn't want to go, so as not to provoke her mother's jealousy, and can't even change into a party dress for the occasion. When they arrive, the celebration turns out to be "a frost," and Pauline breaks the ice by boldly asking young men to dance with her. Suddenly she becomes "everyone's darling" as "eighteen years of suppressed joyousness" are "released for the first time." Among the dozens of strangers her own age, the only person who stands out is a fortyish sophisticated man in a dinner jacket, for whom she feels "secret amusement and almost a sense of pity." At midnight, "to the accompaniment of steam whistles, taxi horns, ferry-boat sirens, and even blank-cartridge shots," this man kisses her on the mouth. "Happy New Year!" he says. "You wonderful child!" An hour later, dizzy with wine and merriment, she goes off to powder her nose with a woman in her twenties named Rita O'Shaw, who has "sleek black hair, uncut and curled over her ears in two flat buns" and seems to Pauline rather "hard." Rita proposes that they spice up the party by going out in just their rose and blue crepe slips and dancing with each other. The exhibition causes Lulu to walk out in disgust and we never hear of her again. Afterwards the man in the dinner jacket invites Pauline to a private party at Rita's place. Only when they arrive and Rita offers her a choice of apricot or turquoise negligees does naive Pauline understand what's expected of her. Horrified but trying to keep up a veneer of sophistication, she slips out without coat or hat "to make a phone call" and flies to the safety of home.

Chapter Three begins on the afternoon of New Year's Day. Pauline slips out of the apartment, returns to Rita's for her hat and coat, and learns more about the fortyish man she didn't spend the night with. His name is Jay Willoughby (the name is probably meant to echo Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby), he makes excellent money giving vocal lessons to wealthy matrons who are somehow hypnotized by him, he lives rent-free with a well-to-do family on Long Island and is emotionally burned out. A sort of friendship develops between Pauline and Rita, based on the "intense zest for life" which they have and Willoughby lacks. A few evenings later Pauline lies to her mother and goes to join Rita for an ice skating date at a 168th Street rink but finds that it's become a threesome. Willoughby has come in from Long Island to join them, despite Rita's having made it clear that there's nothing in it for him sexually. "You'd be surprised at how—how unique you are in his experience," she tells Pauline. A nasty little trick Pauline pulls—hiding in Rita's apartment, hearing the devastation in Willoughby's voice at the "news" from Rita that Pauline is dead, seeing the look in his eyes when she shows herself—convinces her that the man is her slave. At the ice rink Willoughby does just what Woolrich did on the beach with Gloria Blackton: sits on the sidelines. When he takes Pauline aside and invites her to dinner the next evening, insisting that he has no ulterior motive and is not an "ogre," Woolrich unsubtly signals us to believe him. "The only ogre," he announces, "was the one that neither of them suspected existed, the slim and childlike one that would destroy him body and soul in the end. . . ." Willoughby too is something of a Woolrich stand-in, and yet another conscript in the small army of *amour fou* victims, each obsessed by his own *belle dame sans merci*, who lurch through the Woolrich world.

Pauline and Willoughby start dining together at a different fine restaurant every Saturday night, with Pauline telling her mother each time that she's being taken out by a girlfriend's wealthy aunt, whom she also credits for the presents Willoughby showers on her: flowers, books, candy, chiffon handkerchiefs, clothes. The man is "hopelessly idealistic," we are told, and "hopelessly, deplorably in love with her." In a spiritual way only! "I was born too soon," he says to her, "and you were born too late." But all the money and gifts and goopy letters in the world cannot win her youthful heart.

As Chapter Four opens she pays her first visit to his studio, in the neighborhood of Carnegie Hall. Naturally he does not get physical with her but

> with only a lamp lit in a far corner, she rested on the divan and he knelt beside her on the floor, holding her limp hand in his, pressing it to him as though it were something precious, saying things, baring himself, had he only known it, to a stranger. The one pure love of his life, it had come to him at last! And the ideals he had discarded one by one in the course of the tedious disappointed years, they were resurrected now, they were gathered around him once more. . . .
>
> He filled her with talk. . . . [T]he elevated plane of any true devotion, far above the heads of others. Perfect sym-

> pathy, perfect rapport, as the bow to the strings of a violin. . . .
>
> And Pauline . . . wondered, "Aren't we *ever* going out to dinner?"

She doesn't like his music, doesn't love him at all or even understand him but loves the trappings of his devotion—afternoon tea at the Plaza or the St. Regis, dances at hotel roof gardens, dinners, choice seats at hit Broadway shows—and, in true Noir Woman fashion, is intoxicated by her power over him. The more she keeps herself aloof, insults him to his face, embarrasses him in front of the female pupils who hate her for her hold on him, the "more desperately, more cloyingly, more fanatically enamored of her" he grows. She is not only a Woolrich stand-in but a "brat" with "sadistic strains in her make-up."

One day she idly jots down a stupid little poem, a fantasy about dumping Willoughby. Upon reading it the masochistic wimp goes into ecstasies, sets the words to his own tune and invites not only his pupils but a music publisher to a soiree at which the piece is sung by Gloria Tremaine, the self-styled patroness of the arts in whose mansion he resides. Afterward Pauline accepts Gloria's invitation to spend the weekend at her estate provided Gloria gets on the phone and squares it with Pauline's mother by pretending to be Rita's mythical rich aunt. Soon she's spending every summer weekend at the Tremaine place, lolling on the beach with Gloria's teenage daughters, playing tennis with other house guests, treating Willoughby coldly as ever while he suffers like a soul in hell and slips letters full of moonstruck nonsense under her door—"In this world of ours the only worthwhile thing is youth. Always remember that, my dear one, my bright one. And be kind to those like myself who have lost it through no fault of their own"—and begs her to write more verses he can set to music. One evening after dinner and a show they drop in at a club in Harlem, and when Willoughby gets sick from a tot of Prohibition gin, the young man at the next table gives him a hand. Within minutes he's dancing with Pauline. Kimball French is put off by her hard-as-nails manner and tells her that she's either "burnt out or not come to life yet" but asks for her phone number, and she gives him the number at the Tremaine place.

At the start of Chapter Six and the end of June, Pauline is invited to stay with the Tremaines for a month, and wins her mother's consent by saying she's visiting "Rita's aunt." The month is a rehash of her earlier trips to Long Island: gifts and love notes from Willoughby, tennis, swimming. One afternoon at the beach she pens a ditty—"I'm a lonely wave on a great big ocean/Getting nowhere but with lots of motion"—whose second line is a neat thumbnail description of this novel. Just when Pauline is getting as bored as the reader, Kimball French phones her. Lying boldly to everyone in the house, she slips into the city for an evening of dinner, dancing and the Ziegfeld Follies with Kim on her arm and doesn't return till dawn. Before leaving she composes another Significant Jingle, this one entitled "Pleasure Crazy." Woolrich treats us only to the first three lines:

All I ever want to do is play, play, play,
I don't care about tomorrow, all I care about's today,
All I ever want to do is dance, dance, dance—

The next visitor to the Tremaine mansion is Heimer, the music publisher, who asks Pauline if she's written anything that could be set to jazz and goes wild with excitement on reading "Pleasure Crazy," promising to place it with Eddie King, whose orchestra is "second only to Whiteman's in point of popularity." This is followed by the first spat between Willoughby and Pauline, each accusing the other of cheating on their sexless relationship. Then Pauline's mother calls the number of "Rita's aunt" to announce that a registered letter has arrived for Pauline in New York. It turns out, of course, to be a contract for "Pleasure Crazy." Pauline refuses to go back to Long Island but after a week of boredom with her mother and a torrent of tearful letters from Willoughby—"I have been through hell, and at the gesture of your little finger, heaven opens its gates to me once more"—she makes up with the lovesick wretch.

In Chapter Seven, weary of Manhattan's summer heat, Pauline manipulates Willoughby into financing a luxury trip for her to that favorite watering hole of Woolrich characters, Atlantic City. Telling her mother that Heimer's firm is paying the bills, she enjoys several days of seaside leisure and flirtations on the boardwalk dancing piers. Then on the evening before Willoughby is to come down for the weekend she runs into Kim French again. They dance the night away and have a Meaningful Dialogue at dawn.

> Kim: "I guess I kind of love you in a way."
>
> Pauline: "I don't know about love. . . . It's nice being with you. I'm not always thinking different things than what I say. With [Willoughby] I do. With you I just say anything I'm thinking."
>
> Kim: "He's making you *old*. . . . By the time he gets through with you you won't be able to love *any*body."

She refuses to give up Willoughby and his expensive gifts but agrees to drive back to New York with Kim while Willoughby is coming down by train to see her. Then she delays her departure, "accidentally" encounters Willoughby at the railroad station and coolly sends Kim on his way alone. "This is the last time you'll ever lay eyes on me," he roars, throwing her valise out of his car. Once Willoughby has settled into his hotel room—across the hall from Pauline's, not adjoining—he presents her with a hot-off-the-press copy of the "Pleasure Crazy" sheet music and reproaches her for letting him find out about her budding career from others. So this, she muses, is how celebrities are made.

In the cracks between scenes, Pauline's nineteenth birthday has come and gone unnoticed. Chapter Eight opens late in September, on her mother's birthday. Pauline is still seeing Willoughby and still treating him with icy disdain.

> Let him see that he *should* be good to her, *should* take her places, *should* hold the bright side of life open before her like a pocket-mirror. Let him see that he need expect nothing from her in return. . . . Pity him because of the sentimental hash he had made of his life . . . [dancing] to the heartless piping of a nineteen-year-old child.

As a birthday gift, Pauline graciously brings Willoughby home to meet Florence for the first time, and that night she dreams of maneuvering him into marrying her mother. The rest of 1921 is disposed of quickly. Florence is smitten with Willoughby like all his middle-aged women students, but he resists Pauline's blandishments for once—"If it weren't for the fact that she's your mother, she wouldn't exist at all as far as I'm concerned"—and Pauline bends over backward to keep her mother from learning the truth. Meanwhile her musical career is on the upswing. A composer named Jack Lee becomes her collaborator on a number of songs which are published by Heimer and recorded by Eddie King's band, and Zeligman, the white owner of a Harlem cabaret, commissions Pauline and Jack to write a complete new floor show entitled *Tanskins*. All this success she keeps concealed from Willoughby as best she can. On their next dinner date Willoughby announces that a wealthy patron of the arts has agreed to finance his relocation to Paris and asks if Pauline will come with him. She says she will.

Chapter Nine opens on New Year's Eve. Pauline makes a last-ditch effort to force Willoughby to court Florence. "And above my love for anybody, do you hear me, *any*body, there's my love for my mother. . . ." The walking worm again declines the honor. "And after all, even above my love for you . . . self-respect." Why couldn't he have thought of that months ago? Florence finally catches on that Willoughby doesn't care for her and, as Woolrich puts it, her old age begins. In the night-bound street Pauline is hit by a car and undergoes a leg operation with only a cigarette as anesthetic, just for the experience! ("Belongs to the new generation, all right," and "You're a game thing," the doctors marvel.) Willoughby sits at her bedside night after night, showers her with gifts and manages by preposterous ploys to keep her mother from learning that Pauline's in the hospital. When she finds out and rushes to her child's side, she blames Willoughby for the accident and begs Pauline to dump him. Since the poor fool is paying all her hospital bills and she has six weeks' recuperation ahead of her, Pauline replies, why not string him along? After all, he was "born to suffer." Willoughby and Florence never see each other again. During her convalescence Pauline pens what turns out to be her greatest hit, the "St. Francis Infirmary Blues," a real-world jazz classic which Woolrich attributes to his heroine:

And I saw my baby there,
Stretched out on a narrow table,
So cold, so white, so bare.

The night before she's released from the hospital, Willoughby kneels at her bedside, "as at the shrine of a very mortal and very capricious divinity," and begs her not to throw him over. His abasement makes her despise him all the more, and she fantasizes that the "way to teach her to love" is for someone to punch her in the face.

Sobered by her brush with disfigurement and death, Pauline spends the daylight hours at home reading. "She would never be quite so young again, with elixir in her veins; the world was not quite the same golden bubble that she had blown out of a clay pipe and tossed about her head." Evenings, however, she continues to go out with Willoughby, weathering a storm of maternal sarcasm before each date. ("Tell him I know a lovely Old-Men's Home that would be just the place for him, instead of wrecking a young girl's life—") Finally she caves in under her mother's pressure and agrees to kiss him off after one last date. She goes out but doesn't return.

Now comes the first scene since Chapter One which is written from Florence's point of view. Woolrich makes us live in the mother's skin through fifteen endless hours. "Tonight of all nights—anything might happen, any horrible thing might occur to her upon leaving him, upon riding home alone in the depth of the night." Might she not even kill herself? Hadn't she said: "Life never could be dramatic enough to suit me"? The phone rings "like the crack of doom." Terrified, she gropes for it. "Is ish Sally? Say, who zish anyway?" A drunk, calling the wrong number. Time crawls by. There is "a dull thud on the stone flooring outside the door." Pauline? No, the milkman. There is the sound of "the scratching of the cables" as the elevator car rises, and the first scene in the Woolrich canon that truly foreshadows his later career as the master of suspense comes to an end as Pauline walks in the door. She looks stunned, lost. Has she dumped Willoughby? "No," she moans. "Oh, I want to die—I married him today!"

Woolrich had clearly written this novel *before* his own equally insane marriage to Gloria Blackton, for the book was in print two and a half months after the ceremony. Was it coincidence that his life took the same course as his female stand-in's, or have we found a fourth reason for the marriage, that he wanted to see what it would be like to turn the product of his imagination into reality?

In a rapid conversational rehash of what in any other novel would have been shown directly, Pauline fills us in on events after she'd said I Do.

> "All I remember is our having dinner together somewhere and then he said . . . , 'No one can take you from me now.' And then all at once, what I had done came over me—. . . . I must have left him sitting at the table and never gone back!"

Panic-stricken that he'll come knocking on the door to reclaim his bride, Pauline and Florence pack in haste and move to a downtown hotel. Pauline promptly has a nervous breakdown and the doctor who is called in prescribes six months in Europe—which luckily her songs are successful enough to pay for—and a quickie divorce. Just as they're about to sail, Pauline sees in the newspaper that the smash hit Harlem cabaret revue *Tanskins* is going to open on Broadway, and they cancel their reservations to attend the premiere. Suddenly the phone rings: a man downstairs in the lobby wants to see Pauline. For a page or two Woolrich shifts back to the suspense mode. Pauline is so sure the man must be Willoughby that she's about to jump from the hotel room window to her death when at the last moment she learns that the caller is the son of the doctor who had treated her nervous breakdown. Who is the young man? Why, it's Kim French! On this last ridiculous note, with Willoughby having been dropped down the memory hole as if he had never existed, the novel ends with Pauline and Kim married and writing songs together. A dreadful book, unstructured, unfocused, maudlin to the point of hysteria, yet to the student of Woolrich's life and world a cornucopia of perverse fascination. I pity anyone who feels compelled to read it. It was ignored by reviewers of the time and, except for one paperback reprint in pulp-magazine format a few years later (Mayfair pb, no date), it has never since been revived.

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The trauma of walking out on a virginal marriage seems to have affected Woolrich much as it did Pauline Foy. If the doctor prescribed six months in Europe for her, perhaps that was the remedy for her creator too. The first item of business however was to recover the damning diary. Then, on April 1, 1931, Woolrich registered with the Copyright Office an adaptation of *Cover Charge* in the form of a stage play, which presumably he'd completed before his return to the East. This play has never been published or performed and is never likely to be. Woolrich's copy of the typescript reposes today in the Rare Book and Manuscript Division of the Columbia University Library. Once these matters were behind him, he and his mother set sail, the voyage financed no doubt by the proceeds of Grandfather Tarler's estate.

All we know of the trip is what Woolrich tells us in *Blues of a Lifetime*, which isn't much. At one point he mentions the various stickers pasted to the sides of his valise—Red Star Line; Holland-America Line; Hotel Colón, Barcelona; Pension Isabella, Munich—and clearly he and Claire spent a good deal of their time in France. While overseas he completed his sixth novel, *Manhattan Love Song*, and during a stay in Paris he began a seventh, about the lives and loves of ballroom dancers in the City of Light during the year 1912, but finished only one chapter and a brief synopsis. Later they visited the French seacoast.

> Once after days of exploratory bicycling, I found a deserted little cove along the coastline south of Biarritz that seemed to be just what I was looking for for the rest of that summer. I cycled down to it the next day with all my equipment, everything I needed, a shade for my eyes, Gitanes [cigarettes], a couple of bottles of French beer (but always for *after*, never before). It was an ideal place for it; not a person in sight, not even a house, for miles around, the relaxing sand, the blue Biscay water, the warm, soothing breeze blowing from it. Nothing happened; not a word would come; I finally dozed off. It was *too* quiet, not enough background-sound; it was like writing in a vacuum.

Later the trip furnished background and scenery for a host of his suspense tales set in Europe or aboard a transatlantic liner.

The only Woolrich short story published that year and the last tale bought from him by H.N. Swanson was "The Girl in the Moon" (*College Humor*, August 1931), in which we meet yet another man whose woman must satisfy his otherworldly romantic dreams. Marty falls in love with musical-comedy actress Zelda Grayson, whose first name of course is borrowed from Scott Fitzgerald's wife. His wholehearted naiveté so overpowers her that she abandons her career, marries him, moves into a $55-a-month Brooklyn flat, and—now that she no longer has to look beautiful or be "on" every minute—discovers that domestic life makes her deliriously happy. But everyday domesticity is precisely what Marty does *not* want in his wife, and the marriage is soon foundering. Zelda returns to the theater and her old glamorous role, in which Marty sees her and is enraptured once more, and so the wheel spins.

Woolrich didn't do much better in the Depression-wracked short story market when he and his mother returned from abroad, selling just two tales for 1932 publication, both in the Woolworth periodical *Illustrated Love*, neither worth much of our attention. "Orchids and Overalls" (*Illustrated Love*, March 1932) is another rehash of the rich girl–poor boy romance from *Children of the Ritz* but with a few overtones of the grim new era. Electrician Tommy Rogers is sent to a Park Avenue mansion to fix a blown fuse and meets wealthy, spoiled Dale Lowrie Van Zandt Hamilton. The young lady falls for Tommy head-over-gold-plated heels, but as an unreconstructed working stiff he has nothing but contempt for "swells." Dale keeps sabotaging the fusebox to make him return on more service calls until finally, hoping that the shock of proletarian life will scare her off, he takes her out for a working stiff's date: corned beef and cabbage at his mother's apartment and a cheap movie later. His scheme backfires when Dale announces that she simply adores the lifestyle of the lower orders. Only the sudden collapse of the stock market and the financial downfall of Dale's snooty parents permit the couple to get together.

The most bizarre of all Woolrich's early tales of romance is "Women Are Funny" (*Illustrated Love*, October 1932), which qualifies as his first tentative stab at a horror story. The male lead, another young man named Tommy, marries Nanette, a laughably infantile maiden of seventeen years. The bride brings into the marital bedroom a voodoo doll called Guadeloupe, which begins to work various kinds of black magic to undermine the marriage. When the all-but-hypnotized Nanette finally understands the doll's baneful influence and throws it into the furnace, the couple's relationship quickly returns to normal.

Between these long-forgotten trifles came the publication of Woolrich's sixth novel, the last and by far the best of the books he completed in his pre-suspense years, the novel which, although not even he himself could have known it at the time, marked the breakthrough to the work of his maturity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Woolrich completed *Manhattan Love Song* in 1931 at Mondorf-les-Bains, a resort in southeast Luxembourg near the French border, and the novel was published in August 1932 by William Godwin, a small and unpretentious house with a reputation for what was then considered sexually frank material. It was reviewed almost nowhere, read by few, and swallowed up almost at once in the Sargasso Sea of forgotten books. Although packaged as mainstream fiction, by today's standards it's quite clearly a crime novel, focused like several of Woolrich's earlier books on a man's enslavement to a woman.

All five of his previous novels had been written in third person but the central male characters in four of them—*Cover Charge*'s Alan Walker, *Children of the Ritz*'s Dewey Haines, *Times Square*'s Cliff Reilly and *A Young Man's Heart*'s Blair Giraldy—had usually (though only in *A Young Man's Heart* with total consistency) stood for the author's point of view, and even if they were sometimes absent or unimportant for long stretches of text at a time, even if their major scenes on stage often showed them as flawed, Woolrich tended to signal us that these men were not to be judged too harshly. With the exception of Mariquita in *A Young Man's Heart*, the women in the early novels tend to come across as bitches and brats even though *their* major scenes on stage often showed them as deeply sympathetic. *Manhattan Love Song* is the first Woolrich book to be narrated in first person, so that we are trapped inside the male protagonist's mind and skin for two hundred and fifty-six pages, but paradoxically we identify with this man much less than we did with his predecessors. By forcing us into a single consciousness, Woolrich makes us not only empathize with the character's torment but also shudder at his twisted soul. This strategy of splitting our reaction will be seen again and again in the *noir* classics Woolrich was later to write.

Countless other elements from his suspense fiction show up for the first time in concentrated form in *Manhattan Love Song*. The dialogue is studded with precisely the sort of whiny mordant insults that the characters in his thirties pulpers use for conversation. The milieu is that of professional criminals, although Woolrich keeps them offstage and almost metaphysically vague, rooted in the shadowy figures he'd glimpsed in the black car driving off into the night with Vera Gaffney, unconnected with the cardboard gangsters and sinister nightclub owners who cheapen so many of his later tales. The insane force of love pulsates through every chapter of the book, generating an intensity which keeps us from noticing the holes in the plot. In virtually every respect *Manhattan Love Song* belongs not with Woolrich's earlier mainstream novels but alongside his novels and stories of suspense and despair. If his five previous books had suffered from diffuse characters and all-but-nonexistent storylines, his sixth represented a huge leap forward, with an exceptionally tight and unified structure and only three central players, each so well drawn that, as in a Jean Renoir film, we come to see each as seen by himself or herself and as seen by each of the others. Even though for the first time in a Woolrich novel we have a first-person narrator, there is no privileged viewpoint.

The time is night, the year is 1928, the place is New York, and the opening paragraph is one that only Woolrich could have written.

> First she was just a figure moving toward me in the distance, among a great many others doing the same thing. A second later she was a girl. Then she became a pretty girl, exquisitely dressed. Next a responsive girl, whose eyes said "Are you lonely?", whose shadow of a smile said, "Then speak." And by that time we had reached and were almost passing one another. Our glances seemed to strike a spark between us in mid-air.

As if by a miracle, with not a hint of explanation, they know one another. We need no ponderous philosophizing to understand that there could be no other way, that this is their destiny. In the next moment the narrator, Wade, and the woman, Bernice French, are having dinner together, and the moment after that, they are in her luxurious apartment in a tall white building on 55th Street, performing love's shadow play. Already he is in her power, for she is like "a flower, that looks very harmless and sweet, yet when an insect comes near it, it suddenly folds around it and captures it; that's how it lives . . ." She feels no love for him, she says. Her conversation alternates between riddles—"Once I had a ring and a friend. I lost them both at about the same time"—and veiled hints that she's a high-class prostitute, living on "checks in sealed envelopes handed to you by the colored doorman downstairs the morning after." If Wade understands at all, it doesn't affect his love. "The past is a lie. The past is something that no longer exists." They make love "like two frantic, dying things, suffocating in a catastrophe of our own unchaining." He stays the night and is nonchalantly greeted in the morning by Bernice's black maid, Tenacity, referred to by her mistress as "the jig." Before he leaves, Bernice gives him her unlisted phone number but makes him promise to hang up without a word if he hears any voice but her own.

In Chapter Two, Wade boards the uptown subway, "plunging into an iron hut with a ground-glass roof that stood on the sidewalk, down a flight of cement steps laved by tepid air, onto a concrete platform flooded with tawdry dusty electric light. A roar, a hiss, a current of wild air carrying leaves of newspaper on its bosom, and the opposite platform had vanished behind a long row of dirty lighted windows and pneumatic doors that slipped effortlessly back. . . ." Not until he steps into his own flat do we learn that he has a wife. Her name is Maxine and she is still young (younger indeed than Bernice) and attractive. They have known each other eight years and in her youth she seems to have been something of a jazz gamine, but his love for her has soured long ago. Apropos of nothing, Wade tells us that once he had stepped on her feet "brutally, with my whole weight, to make her cry out, to show her who was master and that she must not throw things at me, especially hot coffee." The same sadistic streak recurs in dozens of the protagonists in Woolrich's suspense fiction. The first scene between Wade and Maxine vividly portrays a dead relationship: bitter insults, recriminations, tears (only from her), a song entitled "Kiss and Make Up" coming over the radio. Woolrich takes pains to give Maxine the best lines. "And I sat there until two o'clock, and the light got so it burned my eyes, so I put it out and kept right on sitting there in the dark." What is Wade's reaction? "I was too sensible to wish I'd never met her and never married her, because our love had been beautiful while it lasted, but all my life I've hated responsibility and what worse responsibility was there than this: to have her keep right on loving me after I had stopped loving her. . . ." They share a scratch meal, start fighting again, make up again, go to a movie and then to bed. "Oh, Lord," Wade prays, "give me a break. Let something romantic, something exciting, happen to me. Only once, if never again. Before I'm too old. Break up this life of mine. Never mind about mending it again, I can do that myself. Why did I ever marry her? Without her, every minute would have been an adventure. It isn't fair—" That night he dreams of Bernice.

In the morning they fight again and make up again and Wade goes down into "that twilight grotto they call the subway" on his way to work. "[A] red comet and a green one, side by side, came hurtling out of the gloom and behind them, like an accordion, a long row of lighted cars expanded and came to a standstill." At the end of the day he comes home to yet another insult match.

> Maxine: "So you think I'm sitting around all day doing nothing. Who do you think washes up the dishes after you've gone?"
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> Wade: "What's there to that? Park 'em in the sink, turn on the water, and let evaporation do the rest—"
>
> Maxine: "Who do you think keeps the place clean, the Board of Health?"
>
> Wade: "Maybe that's why I find our four-legged friends in the bathtub every now and again!"

We might almost be in Brooklyn, listening to a spat between Ralph and Alice Kramden. With a significant parting shot—"I'm not pansy enough to get a kick out of doing *your* work for you!"—Wade stalks out for a solitary restaurant dinner. During the meal he uses a pay phone to call Bernice. When a man's voice answers, Wade doesn't hang up as he promised but pretends he's a radio repairman. A few minutes later, having traced the call, Bernice phones him back at the restaurant, clearly trying to convince someone else at her end that Wade *did* call about a broken radio. During the conversation she manages to let Wade know that she'll be free on Wednesday evening.

To which we at once flash forward. When he calls again and learns that she has to go out, he tells her to leave her key with the doorman and promises to be waiting in her apartment at midnight. He doesn't go home that evening but kills time in a barber shop, a coffee shop, wherever he can. Woolrich describes his walk to her place in language foreshadowing the opening of his 1942 novel *Phantom Lady*.

> The whole city seemed full of others like me, coming out of barber shops all dolled up to keep dates with their little loves. Men in gray suits, men in blue suits, men in brown suits, all

> looking alike, all in love with some one, all heading for where that some one was. And some were whistling, and some were intent on the ground before them, and some glanced into every mirror along the way to catch their own reflections, and some bumped into you and apologized with a friendly smile, others bumped into you and gave you a scowl, still others bumped into you and didn't even know you were there at all. . . . All the players were ready for the game of love. . . .

Although several hours early, he takes Bernice's key from the knowing and cold-eyed black hallman and ascends in the elevator to her apartment, which has become his shrine.

> And now magic began, and the world dropped away behind me as I carefully, tenderly shut her door after me. . . . I went around touching chairs and cushions, mirrors, table-tops and doorknobs, light-chains and cigarette-boxes, holding a communion with her through the medium of my coarse, yellowed, banal fingers. And when I found her handkerchief in a corner of a divan, I put it to my mouth there in the dark and kissed it lingeringly. . . .
>
> I got so lonely standing there thinking about her that I had to get out of the moonlight. I went back into the depths of the room with its two funnels of sapphire-blue spilt across the floor, and I felt weak all over and my knees begged me not to move any more and my blood felt like honey that is about to run over the edge of a saucer, so sweet, so lazy, so slow. . . .

This is the Love Wait, identical to the one Woolrich says he experienced in the doorway opposite Vera Gaffney's apartment. Wade's lasts for hours of agony as he imagines Bernice with other men. Finally, long after midnight, she is there, "her image . . . limned in coral like a motionless white statue in a garden flushed by a hidden carmine reflector at its base" while the apartment grows "light with a sort of jazz dawn, instantaneous and blinding." Having wrestled with men all night long, Bernice wants only "to be alone a little, and just to talk to someone from across a room. Oh, I like love, I even love love, but for just a minute I want to feel nothing but air on all sides of me." He throws liquor in her face in lieu of a kiss, and then they kiss for real. "[S]he was a lightning-rod of love. . . ." Later, Bernice voices what amounts to the first rule of morality in the Woolrich world. "Oh, this thing tortures us, doesn't it? All our lives through we're never rid of it. And nothing that we say or do can be held against us, can it, because we're not responsible, are we?" To objectify the maxim: Whoever loves, or needs love, is forgiven much. "I love you," she tells him in the morning. "I knew I would. I told you I would. I do . . . Not forever. Maybe only just for now . . . Wade, will you do me a favor? Don't see me any more . . . [I]f you get in too thick with me you're coming to a quick, bad finish. You're different from the types I've gone around with. Oh, you do the things that all men do, but Wade, you're *clean*, you're *straight*. Those are always the ones that get it in the neck!" Wade responds as he must. "I'll take my chances. Who could be a big enough fool to let *you* slip out of his life?"

Chapter Three unfolds on a Saturday night. Wade visits Bernice's place unannounced and finds her on the way out, bound for a party so as to avoid some men who are coming up. "Don't ask me to explain," she says. "You're nice, Wade. I'm never scared with you." Hinting in a manner understood by us but not by him that if these men catch him in her apartment he's dead, Bernice reluctantly takes him to the party with her. As they are about to leave, "[a] little jewel-like white light over the elevator-door flashed on and twinkled impudently at us." Instantly we are in something of a suspense sequence. Panic-stricken, Bernice and Wade run down the fire stairs, but first he is given one peek at the men who control his woman.

> The elevator-door . . . shot open and slapped a big gob of honey-colored light across the checkered tiled flooring to the base of the wall, and all the way up it. And set right in the middle of this light, like a design in a stained-glass window, was a shadow that looked like a hydra or centipede or octopus, with many legs, one thick body, and then on top of that, numerous heads.

The party is at a penthouse apartment on the corner of Third Avenue and 54th Street. Wade doesn't have enough money on him to pay the cab fare, but the driver says he knows Bernice well and, after learning Wade's name and address, agrees to let him settle up later. The party's hostesses are two cold hard women named Marion and Jerry. From snatches of their conversation we learn as Wade does that both Bernice and Marion had been sweet on someone called Sonny-Boy who now lives in Detroit. Feeling like a stranger in a strange land, Wade starts drinking. At one point he tosses an empty bottle out the window. Ten minutes later a policeman comes up and announces that the bottle has lacerated the scalp of an old lady on the street below, but loses all interest in who was responsible when he's given two quarts of rye. Later, on the rooftop, Jerry makes a play for Wade and invites him to sleep with her. Having overheard Bernice ask her to "jazz" and "vamp" him so as to keep him out of her hair, Wade knocks Jerry down. Meanwhile in the penthouse Bernice has stripped and is offering herself to any man who has $100 cash on him. Horrified and in agony, Wade goes flailing out into the night to raise the money, but none of his friends will lend him a hundred bucks on the spot and without an explanation why he needs it. Rain begins to fall, and "the shimmer of the lights looked like yellow torches blazing up out of the wet pavement." In the theater district Wade encounters a homosexual actor who offers five dollars if Wade will go home with him. During the cab ride Wade prays to the absent god. "Keep her there for me until I get back. I don't know Who or What—but Somebody, Something, keep her there for me until I get back!" Once inside the actor's apartment he beats up the pansy and walks out with the $115 he had hidden in the bathroom behind the toilet paper. "I was saving it for the rent. The show closes Saturday. What am I gonna do?" the actor wails. Ecstatically Wade cabs back to the penthouse, but too late. The party is over, and the hostesses are very coy about what went on after he left. "[A] hundred years from now, it won't make a bit of difference, anyway," Jerry shrugs. Marion asks Wade to let her know if Bernice is receiving any letters from Detroit. Bernice and Wade leave the penthouse together. As their cab is crossing Central Park, where "along every driveway stop-lights were strung like a necklace of little red beads," Bernice goes into hysterics, "panting through a shower of tears that she hated love, wanted to die, wished she hadn't been born." Wade tries to comfort her. "You're a good scout, Wade," she says, and "You can stay if you want. . . ." Inside her apartment, when he opens her pocketbook to slip in the money he stole from the actor, he finds four fifty-dollar bills.

> Wade: "Where'd you get the other two hundred from?"
> Bernice: "Why, don't you realize? You were gone a long time tonight."

He throws the pocketbook in her face and stalks out, sobbing.

But he's back for more in Chapter Four. They have another fight—"I should have broken your arms for you," he says—but when he confesses that he committed robbery to get the hundred dollars for her, she looks at him "with eyes that weren't hard any more," and suddenly becomes "a madonna of tenderness and consolation."

> Oh, I found all things in her. She seemed older than me for a little while that afternoon; our profane love took on a semblance of sanctity. Her cheek was pressed to mine, cool, caressing, reassuring; our intertwined fingers were held before our faces in what unconsciously resembled an attitude of prayer. From the sky outside the sun pierced the windowpanes and shot downward toward our feet in thin golden

> tubes that were like the pipes of an organ. We neither of us moved, we each of us heard music and were fanned by benign wings.

Their dialogue ranks with the most psychotic love talk in the Woolrich canon.

> Wade: "Bernice, Bernice, I'm not afraid any more. My love for you is stronger than anything you can do. . . . So live as you've lived and do as you've done. . . . [A]*lways, always,* from now on, you'll be right and I'll be wrong. . . ."
>
> Bernice: "My baby, my boy, my lover. . . . Even Saturday night, when all that happened, I still loved you. . . . Oh, Wade, are there two of us in each of us, a good and a bad—or what is it?"

Woolrich never lets us know whether she had sex with two anonymous men for $100 each or whether, as she now claims, she led them on and dumped them. In the obsessive atmosphere of this novel, it doesn't matter. Bernice does share with Wade a few more hints about her past and present lives.

> "Wade, you complete the circle for me; by loving you, I've come around again to where I started from. Eight or nine years ago I used to go with a boy like you. . . . [W]hen I told him I'd been drugged and kept locked up in a roadhouse overnight, he went out and got blind from wood-alcohol. Since then I've been dragged through cage after cage of gorillas, and now once more I'm with someone who loves me. . . .
>
> "I feel sometimes as though you were sent my way to remind me now that it's too late. . . . I've had a man die in my arms—I've had to pretend to dance back to my table when I knew I was holding a corpse in my arms, so that people would think he was just drunk—with the blood . . . soaking into my dress in spots the size of dimes. . . ."

The motif of dancing with a corpse was to become central in one of Woolrich's first suspense tales, "Dead on Her Feet" (1935).

Out of this conversation is born a plan. Bernice will abandon her life and they'll go off together to some place like California where they aren't known and can start over again. Working out the details is intercut with more fights and reconciliations and dreams of Eden.

Reality intrudes when Wade goes back to his own flat and learns from Maxine that his many absences from work have taken their toll:

he's just been fired. Naturally this precipitates another brawl with his wife. Unconcerned about being temporarily out of work, since "jobs were plentiful and times were good" in 1928, Wade makes up a feeble yarn about being overworked and distraught and needing a rest, and he and Maxine go out to dinner. "I'm sorry I was mean to you," she says. "It'll all come out all right, won't it?"

The next morning they make a date to take in an afternoon movie and Wade goes out to an Automat to mull over his plan for leaving New York, which includes cleaning out his bank accounts so as to leave Maxine penniless. "[W]hy should I give her a better break than the girl I love?" he asks himself. Maxine never shows up at their meeting place, a drugstore across from Woolrich's beloved Paramount Theatre, but Marion from the Saturday night party happens by, and to get rid of her Wade blurts out a lie about Bernice receiving two or three letters a week from Detroit.

Returning home later that afternoon, Wade finds out why Maxine didn't keep their date. The unpaid cabbie who had taken him and Bernice to the penthouse had come by to collect and had given Maxine her rival's name and address. "I went to see her today," she says. As she relates the confrontation scene, Bernice had not been surprised to learn that Wade had a wife. "That may surprise *you* in a man, Maxine, but it doesn't me anymore." Maxine says that she and Bernice have become friends in a bizarre way, both agreeing that it's up to Wade to choose between them. Then she begs him to choose her. "We've had so much fun together, Wade. Even when we've fought it's almost been like fun. . . . Let's carry the thing through. Let's sing our duet, kiss and make up." He sneers at her, pelts her with insults and goes out for a bite to eat. "Do you want to kiss me?" she asks as he leaves. He does. Returning, slipping into bed beside her, he notices "a little shiny thing, like a pearl, under one of her eyelids when I put the light on. A tear, I guess."

Chapter Five opens the next afternoon when Wade visits Bernice to hear her side of the meeting with his wife. She describes Maxine as "a darn nice kid" and says she's decided against running away with him since if he'll dump Maxine he may someday dump her too. "I'd rather hurt you now than get hurt myself later. . . . If I [run out] I'm quitting a game that *can't* be quit. . . . I'm marked. . . . I'll wait a little while longer before I cut my own throat." She doesn't want to break with him but offers only the continuation of their furtive affair. For him this is not enough. "It's all or nothing, now. I can't go on like this . . . suffering the tortures of hell when I'm not with you. . . ." But he physically can't walk out, and falling to the floor, sobbing, he submits to her terms. They spend the afternoon drinking, and during their maudlin conversation Wade mentions the whopper he told Marion about Bernice's letters from Detroit. Suddenly the glass falls from her hand, her face becomes a "mask of white fright pulled taut from ear to ear" and we are in *le monde noir* again. "You've signed my death-warrant!" she cries out. Desperately she tries to contact Marion, placate her, offer her anything to keep silent about the nonexistent letters from Sonny-Boy, but to no avail: she doesn't live at the penthouse anymore and no one knows where she went. To save her life Bernice agrees to go away with Wade provided they leave that very night. It's that classic Woolrich situation, the race against time and death. Another man and woman will race the clock to get out of the city in the 1937 story "Goodbye, New York," and yet another in the 1944 novel *Deadline at Dawn*. Wade rushes across town to his bank, closes out his account, cashes his last paycheck from work, uses the money to buy two one-way tickets to California at Grand Central Station, where he's to meet Bernice in a few hours. Then he goes home to pack. Maxine is out but comes back when his valises are strapped and he's in the bathroom, "in a cubicle of white tiles that gleamed like milk," shaving, showering for his love, dreaming of her.

> [T]here had never been anything to me at all until now, but now there was this to me: that I loved her. . . . [N]ow I got a break at last. Now rooms were not empty and food was not sawdust. . . . Now *she* had appeared on the scene at last. The fog had lifted and a star shone through. . . .

Hearing Maxine, he snaps out the lights and the bathroom turns blue, "that badge of the nineteen twenties . . . the soul of a generation." She prepares dinner as if nothing is happening. The radio once again plays lyrics appropriate to the mood: "Here I am—here is love—don't pass us by."

> Maxine: "I know you are going to leave me. . . ."
> Wade: "Yes, I am going to leave you. To-night. Right now."

Maxine's face looks "as though a little death had gathered between her eyes." In wretched abjection she begs him not to go. "I'll do anything, *anything* . . . you want me to, only not to lose you! If it's the job, *I'll* get a job, I'll keep things going for us, Wade! If it's Bernice . . . why, *see* her, Wade, see her all the time—don't even live with me any more—I won't say a word, as long as I have you here near me sometimes. . . . Wade, Wade, make it a little easier for me!" Wade's reply is what we have come to expect. "I don't want you near me, Maxine. My love for you's gotten away from me, there isn't any in me any more."

Just as he's walking out, the phone rings. A black man speaking Amos 'n' Andy dialect conveys a message from Bernice: he's to meet her at her apartment, not Grand Central. Valises in hands, Wade walks to the 72nd Street subway station. As he waits for the train, Maxine joins him. "I want to ride with you part of the way; five minutes more is better than nothing." The train comes "hissing and spitting in" and as the stations drop behind them "like beads on a steel-and-electric rosary" she makes a last pitiful effort to hold him. "Try to forgive me, will you?" is his goodbye to her.

If that scene and what follows are dimly familiar to readers of Woolrich the master of suspense, it's with reason: varying the details, he recycled it more than once during his career as a mystery writer, most notably in the 1937 pulp story "Face Work," better known as "Angel Face," and in the 1943 novel *The Black Angel*. But the *Manhattan Love Song* version is by far the most powerful in emotional terms, and the only one presented from the male character's point of view. Wade reaches Bernice's building, goes up, rings the bell. She doesn't come to the door. He enters, finds her closets and drawers empty and her bags packed but no sign of her. Uneasy, he sits down to wait. Has she changed her mind again? Gone out on an emergency? Gone to Detroit to be with Sonny-Boy? Is she waiting for him at Grand Central after all? The minutes crawl by, it will soon be too late to catch their train. He goes back into her bedroom, snaps on the light, and finds her.

"Gone from me," Chapter Seven begins. She is dead.

> Turned from something beautiful into something unmentionable, filthy, fit only to be burned or hurriedly smothered with earth and hidden from sight. The mouth that had known how to smile so beautifully remained open now, where death had gone slinking in. The hands that had roamed in my hair were just white things now on the floor. The blue dress . . . that had encircled a living body's perfection of form, remained now to cover a carcass. . . .
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> Tears bubbled from my eyes . . . my nose ran, saliva dripped slowly from between my lips, a drop at a time. My heart pumped under me like a frantic, imprisoned bird. . . . I died a hundred times, where she had died just once. . . .
>
> I kissed her at last, and the kiss brought only horror and recoil. I cried out sharply at the coldness, the goneness of her, and leaped to my feet and drew back quivering. . . .
>
> It was the finality of it that appalled me so, the utter, utter irretrievability. Oh, how much kinder it would have been, how much more consoling, to have belonged to one of those old, gone generations—and been able to kid myself that I would find her again the day I *went* myself. But knowing that

> the soil, the earth that trees take root in, never, *never* can take wings and rise and speak with a human voice—what was there left for me, what solace had I in the world?

Eventually through the tears of his grief there surfaces an understanding that the message from the black man was a phony and that he's being framed for Bernice's murder. He slips out of the building, past the downstairs doorman and into the night. In a cab on the way to Grand Central Station he changes his mind about using one of the getaway tickets. Realizing he has nothing to live for—"Gray days and endless nights, without her. Month after month of them, year after year of them"—he tells the driver to take him back to where he started. At the apartment building he tells the doorman to call the police, then goes upstairs and sits down to wait.

The cops arrive, an army of "huge feet" and "mammoth legs." Within less than a minute they have set the pattern for Woolrich police interrogations by hitting Wade in the face. Their brutality is intercut with callous official routines in what was to become a *noir* tradition. Wanting only to die, Wade says that he killed Bernice, but since he knows none of the concrete details, not even how she died—he claims he shot her whereas in fact she was strangled—the police helpfully add the correct trimmings to the confession which they prepare for him and he signs. Grief and physical abuse have so badly confused him that by now he isn't sure whether he's innocent or guilty. "All I knew was, every breath I drew was hell fire, every minute that passed was a crucifixion." At dawn they take him away.

Another instant, and he's on trial for murder. Although Maxine has retained a defense lawyer for him at the cost of every cent she had in the world, Wade refuses to help save himself and insists that he's guilty. "God forgive you for what you're doing to the two of us!" Maxine tells him. Berenson, his lawyer, figures out that he's been framed and that Bernice's maid Tenacity must have been instrumental in setting him up for the fall, but fails to provoke Wade into assisting in his own defense even when he accuses him of not caring whether the dead woman is avenged. "What good is it if he *does* get the right guys?" Wade wonders silently. "What good is it if I *do* get even for her? What good is *any*thing? Will it bring *her* back?" Newspaper stories describe Bernice in phrases like "Queen of Hearts" and—a most significant word for Woolrich—"Butterfly."

The novel climaxes in what can only be called a Stupid Murder Trial sequence, guaranteed to make anyone even slightly familiar with courtroom procedure howl with disbelief. The only prosecution witnesses whose testimony is described in any detail are the black doorman from Bernice's building, who is presented as a ludicrous fop, and the homosexual actor Wade robbed, who doesn't have the slightest relevance to the murder case and who comes off as a stereotypical flaming fruit. Just before the District Attorney is to call Tenacity to the stand, she is forcibly taken off the witness list. "They threw acid at her," Berenson tells Wade. "She's lost an eye and the whole lower part of her face's been eaten away—can't talk even if she wanted to." The implication is that "they" were afraid of what she might reveal under Berenson's cross-examination. Why they didn't simply kill her, why she couldn't write down her testimony, indeed why "they" didn't ask Tenacity whether Bernice was getting letters from Detroit before they killed Bernice and framed Wade for the murder, is never explained. At the last minute Wade agrees to let Berenson put him on the stand, but instead of telling the truth he reaffirms his earlier confession. While the jury is deliberating, Maxine tells Wade that she is contemplating suicide. "Wade, if they do this to you, I want to go too." Wade tries to discourage her—"Isn't one of us being here better than none of us being here?"—but Woolrich gives us no reason to believe he's succeeded. The verdict comes in as expected: Guilty. The last paragraph of the novel is as powerful and haunting as the first.

> And it grew dark, and it grew light again, and it grew dark and light again. Maybe six times, or maybe sixteen times or maybe sixty. . . . And the last time they brought me back the judge spoke for a long time, and ended up by saying, "and may God have mercy on your soul." Then I heard a loud cry in a corner of the room, and turned that way, and saw Maxine lying on the floor. And while the world rolled on without her, I wondered if she had died then or was still living. But some day soon, soon now, the world won't have to wonder that about me.

There it is, a hugely neglected *noir* classic, published on the heels of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key*, two years before Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, seven years before Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, eight years before what is wrongly thought Woolrich's first *roman noir, The Bride Wore Black*. Neither he nor anyone else could have known it at the time, but in *Manhattan Love Song* he had made the transition from a writer of flawed mainstream fiction to the creator of a malevolent universe all his own.

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"I came back [from Europe] when the depression hit, with forty dollars and a typewriter," Woolrich wrote in 1946. Actually it was about three years into the Depression when he returned. Soon afterward he moved out of 239 West 113th Street and into a cheap hotel, perhaps with forty dollars in his pocket or perhaps with a bit more, but determined to survive in that ghastly time without his mother or the Tarler estate to fall back upon. "Even God Felt the Depression," the third chapter of *Blues of a Lifetime,* tells what life was like for Woolrich in the year his literary career seemed dead in the water.

"I'd hardly made a cent that whole year," he begins, meaning the year 1933. "Or for that matter the one before, or the one before that. The depression had become stabilized by this time. It was now accepted as a permanent condition . . . People had given up hoping about it." The twenties, when "the work was so easy and the pay was so large" and everyone had been prosperous together, had been "whisked backwards out of the memory" and replaced by the thirties, when "the bottom fell out of the whole world, and everyone was poor together."

> Food and shelter . . . had to be struggled for now. And thousands had lost them altogether. Whole families had broken up. The wives and children . . . went back under their parents' roofs, if they were lucky enough to have parents who still had roofs. . . . The men built colonies of shacks, of cartons and of packing-cases and gasoline-drums and whatever they could get their hands on, and drew their drinking-water from the nearest comfort station . . . and got their food standing in endless, dejected lines outside of public soup kitchens. . . .

It was, as Woolrich put it, "no time in which to be a writer," and especially a writer rooted in the vanished twenties. "Magazines were expiring all over, dropping off like autumn leaves falling from trees. . . . No one cared who got the girl in the story any more. They knew he couldn't keep her very long, nowadays." In February of 1933, just before the closing of most of the nation's banks in the "bank holiday," Woolrich's savings account stood at exactly $61, which he spent on necessities as soon as the banks reopened. He kept from starving by selling off various items he'd accumulated in his palmy days, including a beautiful and valuable gold watch which Genaro's younger brother had left him in his will, and an assortment of limited-edition books, "numbered, inscribed, rag-papered, gilt-edged and beautifully bound," which publishers in the twenties had sent to him as Christmas gifts. He was "starved for recreation" but had so little ready cash that when he wanted to see a 25¢ movie he had to use the fire doors to sneak into the Japanese Garden, a nearby rooftop theater—and was caught by an usher and thrown out at least once.

But nothing could break his will to survive. Whenever he got a rejection slip, he tells us, he would "round my fist, and swing it with all my might into my other palm . . . and mutter doggedly: 'I'll beat this game yet!'" Finally he decided that his only recourse was to write a new novel, one that would sell to the movies for thousands upon thousands of dollars and enable him to lick the Depression once and for all. First National Pictures had been bought by Warner Brothers since filming Woolrich's *Children of the Ritz*, and if Warner's had purchased movie rights to *Manhattan Love Song* the result might well have been a powerful downbeat melodrama along the lines of the studio's 1932 *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*. Even though Woolrich had seen "a fair sampling of the best feature pictures of the early thirties" at the Japanese Garden without paying for tickets, such a possibility never crossed his mind, for in his view all six of his published novels had become "as stale as the speakeasies and knee-length skirts." Instead he pinned his hopes on *I Love You, Paris*, the book he had started in France two years earlier but had abandoned after one chapter and a synopsis.

No one will ever read this novel, but in *Blues of a Lifetime* Woolrich summarizes its plot. The place is Paris, the year is 1912.

> My protagonists were a pair of professional ballroom dancers, the man much older than the girl, who is his pupil and protegee, one of a long succession he has had throughout his career, whom he has taught to dance, made famous, and who then have repaid him by leaving him for some other, younger man. He is in love with his current partner, but she only looks upon him as a father and mentor.
>
> Along comes a younger man the girl's own age, and he and she fall in love. They have a misunderstanding and fall out again. She disappears, and he goes looking for her everywhere and cannot find her. Until, on her opening night, the night of her professional debut, he happens to pass the place where she is to appear and recognizes her from a photograph in the foyer. He goes in to watch her, thinking this will be the last time he will ever see her.
>
> She has an enormous and dazzling success, and instantly becomes the sensation of Paris, but she has recognized him sitting out front, and immediately after the performance she runs out to him, throws her success over her shoulder, and they go off together.
>
> Her partner, who really got a bad deal out of the whole thing, accepts it with graceful resignation (he is used to it by now) and goes back to his former partner, who has been intermittently sending off sparks of jealousy in the back-

> ground throughout the story. The implication is that they will continue to bicker like cat and dog, as they did the first time, but at least will understand each other.
>
> There were also a couple of sub-plots to help fill the thing out, in more or less comic vein. A rich fat maharajah who becomes enamored of the girl, though he already has a retinue of vivacious young Parisiennes who follow him around all over, and a middle-aged American lady tourist from the Middle West, also well-to-do and speaking hilarious (I hoped) broken French, who mistakes the young man for a gigolo and pursues him almost to distraction.

If this account from roughly thirty years after the fact can be trusted, clearly Woolrich had put aside the nightmare world of *Manhattan Love Song* and was returning to the ambience (though not the time frame) of his earliest novels. "If all this sounds pretty bad," he says in *Blues of a Lifetime*, "all I can say is it was. . . . [But] I would have died to defend its merits then." He committed six or eight weeks to "the most driving, uninterrupted drudgery, amounting almost to self-immolation," while continuing to scrape by on the nickels and dimes in his pocket and trying desperately to stall on paying his long overdue back rent. It was a huge gamble but he felt he had no other options.

> I worked, and I worked, and I worked. I worked in the morning, I worked in the afternoon, I worked at night. I don't think typewriter-keys ever took such a hammering before. . . .
>
> The spring was advancing, and tantalizingly beautiful days came; there seemed to be an endless succession of them, as if purposely sent to plague me. . . . Each day had the effect on me of a champagne-cocktail: golden and tingling and heady. And I couldn't even touch it, had to pass it by.
>
> The nights were even more excruciating. To me those long lines of lights that flamed along the Avenues as far as the eye could see were never garish (as they probably were) but glamorous, seeming to hold out a promise of wonderment and magic, and I wanted to be out where they were. Everyone else was, in droves; I could see them passing the corner, from my window, in two continuous opposite-moving streams, and there I sat, in a solitary room, locked in the lonely pool of light cast by a desk-lamp.
>
> But I wouldn't leave the desk. . . . Consummation had to come first.

There it is again, the act of writing equated with the act of sex. What kept Woolrich alive during those months was that his mother had begun paying his bills behind his back. He visited 239 West 113th Street to confront her and ask her not to help him, but wound up taking his meals there much as Dewey Haines in *Children of the Ritz* had eaten at his mother's place during *his* crisis.

Finally, one morning in the black hours before dawn, the book was finished.

> It seemed so quiet all at once, so smotheringly, stiflingly still, after all those days and nights and weeks of cricket-like chattering of the keys. . . . My ears couldn't seem to get used to it. They felt stunned, they almost seemed to be ringing with the emptiness. . . .
>
> The hotel was asleep all around me. . . . And even the street outside, which in that part of New York was as a rule never still day or night, this night seemed to be so too, as if to blend itself in with my mood; just an occasional taxi-horn barking somewhere a block or so off. And the muffled surge of a lonely, passing subway-train would now and then come up through the ventilating-grids on the sidewalk and be plainly heard in the stillness of the streets above.

Literally penniless but crazed with hunger, he borrowed a dollar from the hotel manager and went out to an all-night cafeteria.

> I ordered scrambled eggs and coffee and sat down to them, moaning under my breath with a peculiar mixture of pain and pleasure. The tabletops were white glass and stained with unwiped foodmarks. The sugar was caked in the sugar-sifters. The coffee had been reboiled a hundred times. Still, I'd eaten a thousand times before then, and I've eaten a thousand times since then, but no food I've ever had tasted as good as the coffee in that inch-thick mug and the eggs on that greasy cracked plate that I ate in that cheap cafeteria at three or four o'clock that morning.

Middle-of-the-night scenes in cafeterias of that sort will crop up again and again in his *noir* tales of the later thirties.

Woolrich submitted *I Love You, Paris* to a former editor of his, who was now working at a smaller publishing house and had agreed to act as a sort of agent for the manuscript. Still as hard up financially as before but at least no longer chained to his typewriter, he walked the night streets of the city and waited.

> Every night I used to go out walking, killing time, merged in the drifting crowd I had used to glimpse so longingly from my window. . . . Yes, people still strolled the avenues in the Depression evenings, even if they couldn't do anything else. The lights were as gay as ever, the voices as animated, the smiles as ready, even if the hearts weren't quite as light any more. The lights rippling on the picture-theatre marquees like sprays of colored water, glinting in furriers' show-windows coated with amber-tinted cellophane . . . the lights sizzling on casefuls of zircons and rhinestones like glassed-in fireworks displays, the lights shining from below upward like submerged crocuses at the feet of posturing mannequins. . . .

Finally one morning, weeks and probably months later, Woolrich received a message at his hotel to drop in at the editor's office. Not knowing whether the news would be good or bad, and happening to pass a church on his way from the subway stop to the building he was bound for, Woolrich dropped in—according to *Blues of a Lifetime,* for the first time in his life.

> I had a fleeting impression of a marble-floored vestibule with a stone basin of water . . . set between two massive inner doors, and then I was standing stock-still in the dim interior. . . .
>
> The hush was the first thing I noticed about it. There was some sort of an inner quiet here that other buildings didn't have. . . . Far ahead . . . there were little taper-lights. . . . They reminded me of shimmering teardrops and little ruddy drops of blood. . . .
>
> It had a tragic grandeur to it, and yet an infinite loneliness too. I wondered if the next world was going to be this lonely. People took your loneliness away; God made you feel vastly lonely. . . .

Kneeling there before the emptiness, believer and atheist in one body, he offered a Prayer to the Absent God more or less of the sort we find in both his mainstream and suspense fiction but for the benefit of himself alone, not, as usual in his novels, for another.

> "Dear God: Nature or you, if you are separate, and I don't think you are, or both put an unusually strong love of life in me. . . .
>
> "That's why I ask you: let me have this money now, while I can still enjoy it as it should be enjoyed, to the hilt. . . .

> "Let me have it now.
> "Now.
> "Or not at all."

Immediately afterward, he tells us in *Blues of a Lifetime,* he "felt strangely emptied-out, weak, as when you've just expended all the energy you're capable of." The implication seems to be that prayer is another substitute for sex.

We have only his word for it, of course, that anything like this ever happened. He went on to the editor's office, hoping his prayer had been heard, and there his old acquaintance from better days solemnly handed the manuscript back. No house wanted to publish and no studio wanted to film a bittersweet romance about ballroom dancers in the Paris of 1912. All of his backbreaking labor had gone for nothing. The last exchange of dialogue between him and the editor is reported or invented in *Blues of a Lifetime.*

> Woolrich (mournfully): "I even went into a church and prayed I'd have luck with it."
>
> Editor (with a cynical smile): "You must have picked the wrong church."

That, Woolrich claims, was the end of his youth. Outside in the street he tossed the entire typescript of *I Love You, Paris* into a garbage can and covered it with a layer of powdery white ash. Then, with exactly fifteen cents to his name and needing a nickel for the subway uptown to his hotel, he dropped into a bar and ordered a beer. Out of the goodness of his heart the bartender drew him a second glass on the house, and Woolrich was so overcome by the act of kindness that on the way out, so he says, he turned back to the man and said: "Y'know something, mister? . . . . You're better, even, than God. Because God didn't give me a ten-cent glass of beer free. But you did!" Then, he tells us, "I reclosed the door and went on my bitter, beaten, homeward way, freed forever of any further religious beliefs."

Chapter Three of *Blues of a Lifetime* ends on this note (except for an ironic postscript which we shall soon consider). The autobiography doesn't give us a hint of what happened next, but clearly Woolrich's declaration of independence had boomeranged and he had no choice but to tuck his tail between his legs and go back to his mother. It was apparently at this time that the Tarler children sold their father's house on West 113th Street. Woolrich and Claire took an apartment together in the Hotel Marseilles, a comfortable Victorian pile at Broadway and 103rd Street which was to be his home, or more precisely his prison cell, for the next twenty-five years of his life.

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Part of Woolrich's problems in 1933 were caused by the Depression but he was also suffering from nervous tension and a psychological block—with good reason. Gloria had moved from Hollywood to New York earlier that year and filed in the state court a suit to annul her marriage, on the ground that it had never been consummated. The imminent exposure of his homosexuality must have kept him as keyed up and quivering with terror as the most hard-pressed characters in his later suspense fiction. There was no reason to be afraid. Being a decent person, Gloria said nothing about the diary or the true ground for the action, which Woolrich understandably did not contest. Interviewed for the lengthy article in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, she spared him once again. "We should not have married," was all she said. "The whole thing was silly."

The *Plain Dealer* reporter also spoke to Woolrich and his mother, who for obvious reasons were less than frank. "We had a terrific fuss," Woolrich is quoted as saying, "and Gloria left me. I guess it was difficult for her to understand why I was so quiet. When she left, the world fell upon me just as if there had been an earthquake. Now, I never want to write again. Please don't think I'm seeking publicity in saying this. I am merely obeying my physician's orders. He has warned me not to do any more writing as it may bring on a nervous breakdown."

Claire's comments to the reporter rang the changes on the same theme. "Since his babyhood [Cornell] has been a victim of nervousness," she said. "Only a short time ago while Cornell and I were talking here in our apartment, the door buzzer sounded. It startled me, but it so upset him that for a moment I was afraid he would leap out of the window—he is that highly strung." Sounds like the near-suicide scene at the end of *The Time of Her Life*, but that is what she said, or at least is quoted as having said. "Of course," she went on, "I want him to take up his writing again, and although he seems to have put that quite definitely aside, I'm sure he will feel differently about it when he is well again. . . . What is my son's wife, Gloria, doing just now? You know, I have never seen her."

At the time of the *Plain Dealer* article Gloria was still living in New York, hoping to launch a theatrical career. "Other men?" she replied to a question from the reporter. "That's in the future tense. I don't intend to worry over that now." According to her half-sister Marian Trimble, the marriage to Woolrich "was a sad experience for her, and I think it put her very much on guard for a long time. [But] her second marriage was a beautiful and happy one."

Bernice in *Manhattan Love Song* had it wrong. The decent people don't *always* get it in the neck.

• • •

The only Woolrich material published during the first half of 1934 was a quartet of very short romantic tales, most if not all of them probably written and sold in 1932 or earlier. Three were little more than skits, but the first of the four to appear in print, "Between the Acts" (*Serenade*, March 1934), is a neat and cynical little gem in which, during intermission time at a Broadway play, two separated marriage partners find one another by chance—each being escorted by a hopelessly unsuitable companion of the opposite sex—and joyfully get back together, leaving their quite mutually compatible ex-dates as consolation prizes for each other. The same issue of the same love pulp contained "Insult" (*Serenade*, March 1934), written by Woolrich but published under the one-time-only pseudonym of Ted Brooks. Spectacularly ugly vaudeville star Lizzie Graham is followed one evening by a sailor as she walks from her hotel to the theater. She hopes—ah, how she hopes!—that he's interested in her, and falls into a towering rage when he turns out to want from her only what every other man wants: her autograph.

The third and fourth of Woolrich's 1934 romances are even more trivial. "The Next Is on Me" (*College Life*, May–July 1934) is his version of the oft-told tale where the two strangers meet in a bar, each bemoaning cavalier treatment at the hands of his girl, and soon discover that they're talking about the same woman. And "The Very First Breakfast" (*Serenade*, June 1934) is a bride-who-can't-cook sketch in which "Kittens" Roberts keeps this secret from her Ken simply by ordering a catered breakfast from a local restaurant each morning. In the pit of the Depression, nice work if you can get it! Five years later a newlywed's inedible biscuits will set in motion a grimly suspenseful chain of events in the classic Woolrich novelette "You'll Never See Me Again."

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Later that year, so Woolrich claims in a postscript to Chapter Three of *Blues of a Lifetime*, he noticed in the movie review pages of the newspapers that a new picture had opened at one of the first-run houses downtown. The critics weren't overly enthusiastic, he tells us, but they all mentioned that it was set in Paris in precisely the year 1912. Woolrich at once went downtown to see the film and found it disturbingly familiar.

> There were variations in it here and there, of course; there always are in any film derivation, even when its source has been bought and paid for. But its two leading characters were still a pair of ballroom-dancers, and they still danced their

> highlight-number to the rhythm of Ravel's *Bolero* just as I had specified in my script. As for the dialogue, much of that had been transposed almost verbatim. Not just a few random remarks, but whole stretches, especially in the key-scenes. I couldn't fail to recognize it. . . . In fact throughout it bore such an unabashed verisimilitude to my piece that it almost looked as though somebody had been paid for it. But it certainly hadn't been I.

It's possible that someone in Hollywood had read and plagiarized *I Love You, Paris* while the typescript was making the rounds of publishers and studios, but having junked the alleged source novel, Woolrich had no way of proving his claim even if it was justified, so he said nothing—except in his autobiography. Is there such a movie as he described? He says in *Blues of a Lifetime* that its title included the word *Paris*, but the only known Hollywood film of the period that seems to fit his description is *Bolero* (Paramount, 1934), starring Carole Lombard and George Raft. According to the screen credits, the picture was directed by Wesley Ruggles from a screenplay by Horace Jackson based on a story by Carey Wilson and Kubec Glasmon. Late-night TV addicts will have to decide for themselves if the storyline and dialogue sound like Woolrich.

If he was frustrated seeing a faithful movie adaptation of one of his novels without payment or credit to him, imagine his feelings when a second movie came out that same year which proclaimed that it was based on another of his novels but in fact didn't have the ghost of a resemblance to its source. The film rights to *Manhattan Love Song* had been bought early in 1934 (no doubt for next to nothing) by Monogram Pictures, one of the sturdier of the many low-budget independent studios that came and went during Hollywood's golden age. Monogram's chief contribution to film history in the early thirties was a sixteen-picture cycle of B Westerns starring a tall rangy young Iowan calling himself John Wayne, but more typical of its output were disasters like *The Mysterious Mr. Wong* (1935), in which Bela Lugosi played a Dr. Fu Manchu clone complete with pigtail, silken robe and Transylvanian accent! The movie *Manhattan Love Song* (1934), directed by Leonard Fields from a screenplay by Fields himself and David Silverstein, transformed Woolrich's study in *noir* anguish into a tedious comedy sounding like a spinoff from *Children of the Ritz*, with two wealthy sisters losing all their money and turning over their mansion and their own services as housekeepers to the chauffeur and maid in lieu of back wages. Dixie Lee (the first Mrs. Bing Crosby) and Helen Flint played the sisters, with Robert Armstrong and Nydia Westman as the chauffeur and maid, and Franklin Pangborn, Herman Bing and Cecile Cunningham in featured roles. Fields's "brutal direction and poor story adaptation," said *Variety*, "k.o. [the picture] for serious consideration." Thanks to its "elephantine pace," the reviewer continued, the film "wears itself out long before going anywhere." It's probably a mercy that all but a few prints of this movie seem to have vanished. Woolrich doesn't mention the picture in *Blues of a Lifetime* but he could hardly have thought it very funny.

On the whole however, he probably didn't care, for by then he was on the brink of a new life as a writer, a life that superficially seems worlds removed from his earlier literary career but that in fact, as I have tried to demonstrate, is much more deeply rooted in his previous work than anyone before now (myself included) has recognized. He was about to become the Poe of the twentieth century and the poet of its shadows.

CHAPTER SIX

"I was lucky," Woolrich writes in his autobiography, "I got a second chance. I finally learned to do my job competently only in the mid-Thirties, after I'd already been hitting print steadily for eight years. It would have been a lot better if everything I'd done until then had been written in invisible ink and the reagent had been thrown away." Clearly he never sensed the countless links between his early mainstream efforts and his *noir* classics and never understood that the first of those classics was precisely his last mainstream novel, *Manhattan Love Song*. But the critique of his youthful books and self in *Blues of a Lifetime* is one of the most revealing passages he ever wrote.

Cover Charge, he tells us, was "formless," with "no plot-progression, no dramatic unity, no structural discipline," a product of the then fashionable "slice-of-life" literary school that was saved from being utter trash only by his inborn "facility with words." But after decades of writing a radically different sort of fiction he had concluded, he says, that it's better to have "a damn good basic situation" presented in simple business English than "to be able to work [the words] into a rich weave, make them glitter, make them dance . . . and in the end have them covering nothing but a great big hole." If he's suggesting that his later fiction is carefully structured and plotted, or lacking in vivid imagery, then he must be counted among the worst critics of his own work that ever trod the earth.

Woolrich accuses himself of disguising the hollow centers of *all* his early novels with beautiful words, and even cites chapter and verse to support the charge. In one of his youthful "clinkers," he says, "it had taken me a full one-and-a-half pages . . . to describe a man riding up in an elevator from the ground-floor to the third. Nothing happened that might have extenuated it. . . . No one else was on it with him. He just stood there and thought." The only trouble with this critique is that not a single scene in any of his first six novels fits his description!

Another count against his early output, he says, is that it sold too quickly and without enough struggle. "If there is one thing that is sure death to a writer," he insists, "it is . . . having too easy a time of it. . . . If he can get published without having to exercise self-discipline in his turn-out, he may never really learn how to write well at all." Nothing terribly interesting in that remark.

A few pages later he condemns his youthful self even more harshly than his early fiction, for wasting too much time on twenties frivolities (especially bootleg liquor) and not taking his writing or anything else seriously.

> It is a wrong thing and a bad thing to pervert yourself like this. There is nothing more wrong, more bad, that you can do. You don't harm others, only yourself. You destroy the you that was meant to be, that was placed there to be, that would have been and should have been, far more thoroughly than the world around you ever could have. This is a form of suicide-in-life, and I committed it.
>
> I would have been a great writer. I would have been a great and a good man. I would have left a name that would have gone down in the annals. And, speak it low, I would have led a happy life.

He *says* he is referring to "the credo of escape from responsibility" identified with the twenties—"I was a true son of the Twenties. . . . I made the twenties last for forty years"—but beneath the surface he seems to be talking about an aspect of himself that he despised more than simple frivolousness, and I find it hard to resist the conclusion that, in the most veiled and subtle way, he's describing his homosexuality. Yet only two pages earlier in *Blues of a Lifetime* he speaks of the philosophy that informs some of his most powerful fiction, for example the 1945 novel *Night Has a Thousand Eyes,* the principle of unalterable destiny. "The path you follow is the path you have to follow; there are no digressions permitted you, even though you think there are." But who can be blamed for anything, or blame himself, if all is predetermined? It's a flat contradiction in terms.

We have reached the core of Woolrich's divided self, the wellsprings of his vision, the heart of his darkness.

• • •

Classical detective fiction is one of the most optimistic of genres. It presupposes that in most respects all is right with the world, and that the few patches of darkness are illuminable by the light of human reason. The murder of Sir George in the library of his ancestral manor is but a momentary aberration, a glitch. Once the detective has organized the clues into a rationally harmonious mosaic, the guilty person is exposed and the world restored to its Edenic innocence. What connects Poe and Conan Doyle and Chesterton and the authors like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers and Ellery Queen and John Dickson Carr and Rex Stout who dominated mystery fiction in the decades between world wars is precisely this crypto-religious outlook in their work. The rejection of this outlook is what unites the disparate group of writers to which Woolrich belonged, the group that created a different sort of mystery fiction, set in a radically different universe.

The first and in many respects the most influential of these writers was Dashiell Hammett (1894–1961). In his major novels—*Red Harvest* (1929), *The Maltese Falcon* (1930) and *The Glass Key* (1931)—the world is not friendly and innocent but harsh, cruel and riddled with guilt. Pain and death are in the atmosphere like oxygen. Solving one or a few murders is like putting a Band-Aid on a cancer. Events are incomprehensible and out of control. No one can really know another person. We live in a world of political and social corruption, personal alienation and despair, a world beyond redemption. This perception of the universe has come to be known as *noir*.

Hammett gave perfect form to his view of life in the parable Sam Spade tells Brigid O'Shaughnessy in Chapter VII of *The Maltese Falcon*. He had once been hired to locate a prosperous realtor named Flitcraft who had left his office to go to lunch one day and had never returned. Five years later Spade found him, married to another woman, living a comfortable bourgeois life much as he had before. Why had he vanished? On the way to lunch that day he had happened to pass beneath a building under construction. "A beam or something fell eight or ten stories down and smacked the sidewalk alongside him." His brush with death made Flitcraft feel as if "somebody had taken the lid off life and let him look at the works. . . . The life he knew was a clean orderly sane responsible affair. Now a falling beam had shown him that life was fundamentally none of these things. . . . He knew then that men died at haphazard like that, and lived only while blind chance spared them." In time this insight had faded and he had slid back into another clean orderly sane responsible life like his first. Spade's point of course is that one mustn't let it fade, that the randomness of the universe should never be forgotten. This parable is as crucial to the *noir* sensibility as the fire sermon is to Buddhism, or the allegory of the cave to the philosophy of Plato. Again and again in subsequent *noir* literature and films it is quoted, alluded to, varied, expanded upon, played with, but it never ceases to be the leitmotif.

The parallel between the fictional experience of Mr. Flitcraft and Woolrich's real-world experience in the valley of Anahuac is astonishing. Both Hammett and Woolrich were raised in at least vaguely Catholic environments, and the Flitcraft and Anahuac stories represent, among other things, each man's revolt against religion. But the differences between Hammett's and Woolrich's fictional worlds are also crucial. Hammett's is completely random and impersonal, as it must be if blind chance rules. Woolrich's is more ambiguous, with falling beams attributed now to chance, then to unalterable destiny written in the stars, yet again to actively malevolent supernatural powers—and sometimes to two or all three at once. In Hammett one copes with the nature of the universe by living in internal exile, holding to a private code of honor, trusting nobody, loving nobody. In Woolrich one lives and dies alone but without a code and always searching for that one other person who could help build a fortress against the dark. Hammett in short is a stoic, Woolrich a romantic. Hammett's style is hard-edged, laconic, colorless, without adornment and almost without emotion. Woolrich's is soft-edged, verbose, full of vivid color and brimming with emotion. They never met each other and may never even have read each other but *noir* literature could not have existed without them.

Nor without two slightly later writers, James M. Cain (1892–1977) and Raymond Chandler (1888–1959). Cain's background was also marked by rejection of a vaguely Catholic upbringing, although neither his life (as related in Roy Hoopes's monumental 1982 biography *Cain*) nor his fiction reveals any crucial event on a par with the Anahuac experience or the Flitcraft parable. In his two major *noir* novels, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1936), Cain explored two motifs with which he is peculiarly identified. The first and more important of these is a man's sexual enslavement by a coarse, greedy, worthless, sluttish woman who entices and manipulates him into committing a crime which in due course turns their passion to hate and destroys them both. This sort of female character harks back to Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*—and perhaps to warnings against Eve the Temptress in the sexual indoctrination of Cain's and Hammett's Catholic childhood. We don't know whether Woolrich was subjected to similar indoctrination but we've already encountered several pairs of cold manipulative women and obsessed men in his early novels, climaxing with Bernice and Wade in the 1932 *Manhattan Love Song*. There are fundamental differences, however, in the two authors' treatment of this theme. In Cain, who was heterosexual, the central elements of such relationships are violence and graphic sex. ("Rip me, Frank, rip me!" Cora cries out in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.) In Woolrich, whose experience with women was minimal to nil, the obsession has no physical dimension and is usually tinged, even in the pre-crime novels, with overtones of religion. There is no evidence that Cain had read Woolrich but likewise no doubt that Woolrich had staked out this literary territory first. The second of the motifs usually associated with Cain is a particular ironic ending where the protagonist gets away with the crime he actually committed but is punished for one he didn't. Woolrich almost certainly read Cain—and liked this ending so much that, as we shall see, he borrowed it again and again for his suspense stories, almost as if he were getting even with Cain for appropriating the motif of sexual obsession.

In 1939, after six years of writing for the same crime pulps as Woolrich, Raymond Chandler published his first novel, *The Big Sleep*, and within a few years he had become the fourth corner, so to speak, of *noir* literature. Chandler's world is as corrupt socially and politically as Hammett's and, although his religious roots were vaguely Irish Protestant rather than Catholic, most of his women characters were cut from the same bolt of cloth as Hammett's Brigid and Cain's Cora. Chandler's distinctive contributions to *noir* were a brash and colorful style of first-person narration, as vivid as Woolrich's but more amusing and packed with memorable images, and a long-running series character, the heroic private eye whose knightly virtues and personal integrity are seen as redeeming the corrupt milieu.

Hammett, Woolrich, Cain and Chandler define the originial boundaries of *noir* literature. Once their novels and stories had attracted Hollywood's attention, they gave rise to a new kind of film which both thematically and in terms of visual style was the cinematic correlative of their prose. This kind of picture has come to be known as *film noir*. The first generation of *noir* directors—Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Orson Welles, John Huston and a host of others—turned upside down the nice safe characters and neat plots and upbeat endings of conventional American movies just as decisively as their literary forerunners had overturned the comfortable rationalism of the classic detective novel. Although the *noir* sensibility in both fiction and films has evolved away from the vision of its pioneers, it survives and flourishes in both media as the twentieth century approaches its final decade. Our concern here is not to write a history of the *noir* tradition, which would take a book as long as this one, but rather to describe the particular *noir* world that Woolrich created.

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This world first took shape in the pulp mystery magazines of the thirties, which published well over a hundred of his short stories and novelettes before the appearance of his first overt crime novel in 1940. The exact order in which these shorter works were written will never be known, but if we look at them more or less in the order of their publication, we sense a gradual movement from pulp to *noir*. The earlier the story, the more likely it is to stress pulp elements: one-dimensional macho protagonists, preposterous methods of murder (which are so common that I treat them as a distinctive type of tale), hordes of cardboard gangsters with predominantly Italian names, dialogue full of whiny insults, blistering fast action. Of all his pure pulpers the stories that have best survived the years are the nonstop action whizbangs like "You Pays Your Nickel" (1936), better known as "Subway."

But even in his earliest crime stories the pulp elements tend to be intermingled with aspects of *noir*. His first short mystery, "Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair" (1934), is a Bizarre Murder Method tale set among people so victimized by the Depression that they can't afford relief from agonizing toothaches. Worked into the climax but almost as a throwaway item is the protagonist's race against the clock to reach safety before he's killed by the poison that he let a psychotic dentist administer to him. Had Woolrich written the tale a few years later, this would have been the central theme, and we would have sweated and shuddered with the man for dozens of pages and thousands of words as his nightmare stretched out. In "Walls That Hear You" (1934), published two weeks after Woolrich's pulp debut, we find the first of his angels of vengeance, a harmless guy who turns into a fury as he hunts the madman who mutilated his kid brother. And in his third mystery tale, "Preview of Death" (1934), there's a primal Falling Beam sequence as the detective watches the shooting of a scene from a Civil War movie and suddenly the star is enveloped in flames and burns to death before his eyes. Nowhere near all of the early Woolrich stories contain seeds of *noir*, but many of them do, and we shall examine each in turn. Our goal here is to outline the features of the Woolrich world, the dark universe that worked itself pure from story to story over the fifteen years of his most intense creativity.

That universe is a trap, an incomprehensible place where beams happen to fall, and at the same time are predestined to fall, and at the same time are toppled over by malevolent powers; a world ruled interchangeably by chance, fate and (to borrow a phrase from Mark Twain) God the malign thug. Three in one, echoing orthodox Catholic doctrine about the holy trinity. In stories like "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (1938) and "The Light in the Window" (1946) and in the novels *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1945) and *I Married a Dead Man* (1948) we are given two incompatible but mutually reinforcing accounts of the nature of the universe: (1) innocent lives are destroyed by a tightly knit pattern of events so dependent on multiple coincidence that some sadistic power beyond blind chance must be in control; (2) innocent lives are destroyed by a situation in which there are only two logical possibilities but neither makes sense or squares with what is known. This in a nutshell is Woolrich's metaphysics. The world of Hammett is a Victorian drawing room by comparison. Those commentators who wrote before *noir* became the standard descriptive term were not off the mark when they described the Woolrich type of fiction and film as paranoid thrillers.

In most of his work the metaphysical forces are kept in the background only, but the everyday world he portrays is just as terrifying and treacherous. The dominant economic reality, even well into the forties, is the Depression. The dominant political reality is a police force made up largely of sociopaths licensed to torture and kill, the earthly counterpart of the savage powers above. The prevailing emotional states are loneliness and fear. Events generally take place in the hours of darkness, with a sense of menace breathing out of every corner of the night. One of the keys to Woolrich's greatness is the unique word magic which makes this bleak cityscape come alive on the page and in our hearts.

Another, no less important key is his peculiar genius for creating situations perfectly consonant with the nature of his world. The Noir Cop story: a plainclothesman solves a murder or other crime but our interest is concentrated less on the plot than on the sadistic police procedure that is both routine and routinely accepted, even by its victims. The Clock Race story: the main character runs an unbearable and usually unwinnable marathon against the forces of time and death. The Waking Nightmare story: the protagonist comes to after a blackout—caused by amnesia, drugs, hypnosis or whatever—and then finds objective fragments from his bad dream all over and slowly becomes convinced that he did something horrible while out of himself. The Oscillation story: the viewpoint figure has built a tiny island of love and trust and friendship with another person only to see its foundations eaten away by suspicion—now rising, now falling, first rejected, then half believed, then suppressed only to rise again stronger than ever—that the other person is evil. The Headlong Through the Night story: we are plunged into the last hours of a hunted man as he flails desperately across the dark city to his doom. The Annihilation story: chance/fate/God has smiled, the protagonist (always a man) has found the one right woman, but suddenly she vanishes as if the universe had swallowed her up, and under such circumstances that he not only can't find her but can't establish that she ever existed. And most terrifying and personal of all, a kind of story to which I will not attach a name, where we are compelled to share the final hours and minutes of someone torn apart by the ultimate torture: knowing that he or she will die in a particularly awful way and at a particular moment. These situations, and variations on them, and others like them, are paradigms of our position in the world as Woolrich sees it. What other writer created a milieu so worthy of the name *noir*?

We must surely count these among the building blocks that hold the Woolrich universe together. But what about the element which above all else made him a legend in his own lifetime? Woolrich is best known as the supreme master of suspense, whose words, like Hitchcock's images on film, keep us on the edge of our seats and gasping with fright. Certainly a good deal of his unsurpassed skill as a suspense writer is attributable to the nightmarish situations he conjured up and the power of his best prose—compulsively readable, vivid, highstrung almost to the point of hysteria, full of linguistic blunders that add to the sense of composition at white heat—to force us into the skins of the hunted and the doomed, living their agonies and dying a thousand small deaths with them. But suspense presupposes uncertainty. No matter how nightmarish the situation, how overwhelming the menace, how deep our empathy, if we know in advance that the protagonist will prevail, as we do for example in James Bond movies, then real suspense becomes impossible. This is one main reason Woolrich never used a series character guaranteed to return for more exploits. And if we know in advance that the protagonist will be destroyed, there likewise can be no real suspense but only the morbid fascination of watching an inevitable slide to doom, as in the crime novels of David Goodis. Woolrich was too canny a storyteller to stumble into this pitfall. If there is no assurance that a particular novel or story will end in triumph, neither can there be any that it will end in ruination. Despite his congenital pessimism he manages any number of times to squeeze out an upbeat resolution. In his oscillation stories, for example, sometimes the suspected person is innocent and the damning evidence the result of a frame-up or the sort of outlandish coincidence to which even in his pre-crime period he was prone; sometimes the suspect is indeed guilty; and occasionally, as in *Rashomon*, neither the characters nor the reader ever learn the truth and we are thrown into the primordial chaos at the world's heart. A reader can never know in advance whether a particular Woolrich novel or story will be light or dark, *allègre* or *noir*, and this is yet another reason his work is so hauntingly suspenseful.

Of course, even though there are no *series* characters in Woolrich, there are *viewpoint* characters in each of his stories and novels. Typically these characters are trapped in living nightmares of one sort or another, and in a number of his tales, for example "Johnny on the Spot" (1936) and "The Heavy Sugar" (1937), he forces us to live unequivocally within his protagonists' skins. But in much of his finest work, even while exerting all his power to make us identify with his viewpoint character, he is also making it impossible for us to do so unambiguously. *He splits our reaction in two,* stripping his protagonists of moral authority, denying us the emotional luxury of total identification, portraying his viewpoint characters as at least psychologically warped and sometimes as totally despicable so that we are forced to pull away from complete union with the man or woman at the center of the storm and so that a part of us wants to see that person suffer. This is why Paul Stapp in "Three O'Clock" (1938) is presented as pathologically jealous to the point of planning murder, and why Robert Lamont in "Men Must Die"/"Guillotine" (1939) is a cold-blooded killer.

The other and more perverse side of this coin is that Woolrich also denies us the luxury of total disidentification with all sorts of sociopaths, especially those who wear badges. His Noir Cop stories are crammed with acts of police sadism, almost always committed or clearly endorsed by the detective protagonist. In his fifth published crime tale, "The Body Upstairs" (1935), the murdered woman's innocent husband is tortured with lighted cigarettes in a precinct station backroom until he makes a false confession, at which point the plainsclothesman narrator chews out the husband as a weakling who can't take a little pain! A few months later, in "Dead on Her Feet" (1935), the cop protagonist knows that the murdered woman's lover is not guilty but forces him to dance with her corpse until he cracks up. These fascist monstrosities are explicitly condemned almost never. One might defend Woolrich's approach by arguing that he was writing about institutionalized sadism as it looks from within, and couldn't violate that viewpoint for the sake of a stirring Frank Capra speech from a guy in a white hat. Leaving out such speechifying, leaving the moral outrage to us with no internal support from the stories except the objective horror of what is shown, does make his police tales stronger and more disturbing. But the voice of suspicion still whispers that this aspect of his fiction stems from a sadistic streak in Woolrich himself. Once again our reaction is split in two. In a very real sense this is the core of Woolrich's cunning and the secret of his power. *His most characteristic novels and stories are divided against themselves so as to evoke in us a divided response that mirrors his own self-division.* This I call the strategy of divided reaction. We shall encounter it in Woolrich again and again.

On at least one subject he might be expected not to split our allegiance, and that is love. Certainly his work tends to make us identify unambiguously with whoever is lonely, whoever is in love, or needs love, or has lost it. Woolrich longed for love as a dying man in the desert longs for water. He never found it. Probably he wouldn't have found it had he lived a hundred years. From its absence in his life springs much of the poignancy with which he portrayed its power, its joys and risks and pains, and much of the piercing sadness with which he described its loss. There is an unforgettable moment in the second chapter of the 1942 novel *Phantom Lady* when the morgue attendants are carrying out the body of Scott Henderson's wife. "Hands riveted to him, holding him there. The outer door closed muffledly. A little sachet came drifting out of the empty bedroom, seeming to whisper: 'Remember? Remember when I was your love? Remember?'" But even in this realm the rule of divided reaction holds true. Romantic that he was, yearn for love though he did, Woolrich knew in the depth of his soul that lovelessness could catapult a person over the edge, and several of his most famous novels are paradigms of divided reaction in which the protagonist—Julie in *The Bride Wore Black*, Alberta in *The Black Angel*, Johnny Marr in *Rendezvous in Black*—destroys his or her own life and the innocent lives of countless others in a mad quest to save a loved one from death or avenge one who has already died.

Once and only once Woolrich will unite himself and us with his protagonist, and that is at the moment when he or she is face to face with the specter of Anahuac. On the brink of death it doesn't matter anymore what a person has done: saint or monster, sane or mad, Woolrich is with that person, becomes that person and makes us do the same. In the most powerful story he ever wrote, the 1938 "Three O'Clock," we sit bound and gagged and paralyzed with the morally warped Stapp in his own basement while the time bomb he has set but can no longer reach ticks closer and closer to the moment of destruction, and Woolrich punctuates the unbearable suspense with religious language and imagery clearly echoing the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, whose agony likewise ended at three o'clock. In the brief electrocution scene of "Three Kills for One" (1942), the cold steel hood falls over the head of the murderer Gates and he whispers: "Helen, I love you" as the current begins to fry him. No character named Helen ever appears in the story. At the point of death we are forgiven much, and if we love we are forgiven everything.

The intense, feverish, irrational nature of the Woolrich world is mirrored not only in his strengths as a writer but in his faults as well. As a technical plot craftsman he is sloppy beyond endurance. Outlandish contrivances, outrageous coincidences, "surprise" developments that require us to suspend not only our disbelief but our knowledge of elementary real-world facts, chains of so-called reasoning that a two-year-old could pull apart—all these gaffes will be found in abundance and many more besides as we explore his novels and stories. But the principle of divided reaction operates here too. In his most powerful work these are not gaffes but functional elements that enable him to integrate contradiction and existential absurdity into his dark fabric. What careful craftsman could have written "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" and *I Married A Dead Man*, where no conceivable explanation can account for events and we are faced with the irreducible senselessness of the universe? What meticulous researcher could have dreamed up the bone-freezing police procedures in Woolrich's Noir Cop stories? What routinely competent yarn-spinner would have dared to write a tale like Woolrich's "Three Kills for One" (1942) in which Eric Rogers carries on his fanatical crusade for three years without visible means of support, as if his rage to restore order to his world were all the food and drink he needed? Long before the Theater of the Absurd, Woolrich knew that an incomprehensible universe is best reflected in an incomprehensible story.

The same dichotomy prevails when we look at Woolrich's style. Judged in isolation, purely on its merits as prose, it's dreadful. No discipline or control, rampant emotional hysteria, a sprawling overabundance of words and phrases and clauses crying out to be cut, sentences without subjects or predicates or rhyme or reason, words that clearly do not mean what Woolrich guesses they mean—a complete catalogue of his literary offenses would be as thick as the one from Sears. In his article "Vertiginous Kitsch" (*The Literary Review*, September 1985) critic Jerry Palmer says that Woolrich "is the best argument yet invented for speed-reading: his purple prose is so atrocious that normal word-by-word reading is painful. . . . [H]e is guilty of such abuses of the English language that it is a privilege to find them." The charge is not without justice, and many a Woolrich defender could provide supporting evidence in the form of Favorite Groaners from the canon. Palmer cites a description of sunlight on a windowpane as "God's own soapsuds." My own nomination is from Chapter Six of *The Black Curtain*: "His face was an unbaked cruller of rage." Palmer gives Woolrich top marks for devising nightmarish story situations but finds no redeeming value in his prose. "It takes a certain callus on the soul," he says, "consistently to come up with such gems." What he fails to see is that many (but by no means all) of the features of Woolrich's style that seem appalling when judged in isolation are functional in his doom-shrouded world, just like many (but by no means all) of his so-called plotting flubs. Without the sentences rushing out of control across the page like his hunted characters across the nightscape, without the manic emotionalism and indifference to grammatical niceties, the form and content of the Woolrich world would be at loggerheads. Take any of his most headlong passages and remove the signs of haste and white heat, recast the scene in cool calm controlled prose so that it sounds like John Collier, say, or Roald Dahl, and you will have gutted it. Between his style and his substance Woolrich achieved the perfect union that he never came within miles of in his private life.

No one can say how much of what lies at the core of his world was consciously intended and how much the unconscious product of his inner demons. Those who wish to be formalists, treating his work as a self-standing entity and refusing on principle to ask about its roots in his life, are free to do so. Those who want to trace back every distinctive element of his world into his twisted soul, attributing them to his loneliness, his paranoia, his Oedipus complex, his sadomasochistic streak, his homosexuality, his yearning for a father or God, are likewise free to take that approach. He was a chameleon, a man of smoke, a Rashomon figure. His life and work are riddles without solutions. I hope in this book to steer a middle course.

The next thirteeen chapters will explore the novels and stories Woolrich published between the summer of 1934 and the end of 1948, the fourteen and a half years during which he made almost all of his countless contributions to *noir*. Biographical material in these chapters will be minimal because he spent those years in a shell, isolated in the Hotel Marseilles, going out almost never, trapped in an intense love-hate relationship with his mother and in his own self-division and self-contempt, shaping his experience and his inner wretchedness into work that will haunt us forever. Here is the world that Cornell Woolrich made, the poetry he formed out of the darkness.

PART TWO

NIGHTMARES

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was in 1934 that Woolrich's distinctive world began to take shape in the pulps. If he had trouble starting over, there's no hint of it in *Blues of a Lifetime*, which draws a veil of silence over everything that happened to him between the junking and the alleged Hollywood plagiarism of *I Love You, Paris* and the year of his mother's death, almost a quarter century later. But we need not imagine for ourselves what trying to break into the pulp fiction market in 1934 was like. That was precisely the year when Frank Gruber (1904–1969), a talented contemporary of Woolrich who was to enjoy a long lucrative career writing Westerns and whodunits and movie and TV scripts, came to New York from rural Illinois to seek his literary fortune. Unlike Woolrich, Gruber has left us a vivid memoir of the world of cheap fiction in the pit of the Depression.

According to his invaluable reminiscence *The Pulp Jungle* (1967), about a hundred and fifty pulp magazines could be found on the nation's newsstands in 1934. The most firmly established publishing house in the field was Street & Smith, which had been founded in 1855 and had its own six-story building at 79 Seventh Avenue, just north of Fourteenth Street. Among the three dozen titles it published regularly in 1934 were mystery magazines like *Detective Story*, *Clues*, and most famous of all, *The Shadow.* The next most solid pulp publisher was The Frank A. Munsey Company, with a lineage dating back to 1887 and a line-up of titles that included *Argosy* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*. The feisty newcomer on the pulp publishing block was Popular Publications, with offices at 205 East 42nd Street, a company only a few years old but already pumping out around two dozen periodicals including the classic *Dime Detective.* Then came Magazine Publishers, at 67 West 45th Street, which put out *Ten Detective Aces*, and Ned Pines' Standard Magazines group, which was responsible for cheapies like *Thrilling Mystery*, and Warner Publications, at 515 Madison Avenue, home of the famous *Black Mask.* If you wanted to write mystery fiction, you sold to these markets or you starved to death. Between twelve and thirteen hundred men and women (mostly men) made their livelihoods writing for one sort of pulp magazine or another. A few—like the legendary Max Brand, who could crank out five thousand words in an hour or two—became fabulously wealthy. Others barely scraped by. The base rate at most pulps was a penny a word, but contributors to *Detective Fiction Weekly* or *Black Mask* might be paid double, triple or quadruple that figure, and for each of his multitudinous words Max Brand was rumored to receive a nickel.

If word rates for most pulpsters were low, so was the cost of living, even in New York. "You could get a furnished room at five or six dollars a week," Gruber wrote in *The Pulp Jungle.* "An apartment, of sorts, cost little more. . . . You could get a room or apartment in Greenwich Village for much less. I knew several writers in the Village who had 'apartments' that cost them only twenty-five or thirty dollars a month. Fifty a month for an apartment was living it up."

Good food was cheap too, Gruber tells us. "Your food did not cost more than ten dollars a week and you ate well. A breakfast at Nedick's, the famous orange juice stand, cost ten cents. For that you got a small glass of orangeade, two doughnuts and a cup of coffee. Lunch at most of the mid-town restaurants was forty-five or fifty cents; dinner seventy-five cents to a dollar. If you were hard up, or ingenious, you could eat for much less. Thompson's on Sixth Avenue had two pork chops, coffee and the regular side dishes and bread for thirty cents."

A ride on the New York subway in those days cost a nickel. The plush Roxy Theater on Seventh Avenue, which offered a stage show and a top movie, charged 35¢ before 6:00 P.M. and 55¢ afterward. At smaller theaters it cost from twenty-five to forty cents to see a double bill. A pair of Thom McAn shoes would run you $3.50, a suit at Bond's about twenty bucks. For $750 you could buy a big sturdy Buick auto.

You couldn't do any of this, of course, if you were a writer and your stories were rejected or if the pulps that bought from you were slow to pay. Within a few weeks after hitting New York, Frank Gruber was down to his last ten cents. After a fruitless visit with an editor who owed him money he had to walk across the Brooklyn Bridge to Times Square in order to save the dime for his lunch. In his first months in the city he was earning barely enough to buy meals at MacFadden's Penny Restaurants, the poor man's haven, where a hamburger made of meat-flavored sawdust cost four cents, a hard roll was a penny, and you could get a cup of coffee (made from dishwater with a dash of chicory) for two cents more. "You ate the meal standing up, which was good for your digestion."

At least once a day when he was near broke, Gruber dined on Automat Tomato Soup at the Horn & Hardart restaurant on Broadway. These unique and now vanished eateries consisted of walls full of little cubicles. You put two nickels into the appropriate slot, turned a knob, opened a door and took out the sandwich you wanted. You put one nickel into the appropriate slot, slid a cup under a nozzle and it was filled with black coffee. Hot water was free but a teabag cost another nickel. To make Automat Soup you "got a bowl intended for soup, went over to the hot water nozzle and filled up your bowl. You sidled along to where you got the soup and picked up a couple of glassine bags of crackers (free), supposedly to go with the soup. You now went to one of the tables, sat down and crumbled the crackers into the hot water. Every table had a bottle of ketchup. You emptied about half of the ketchup into the hot water and cracker mixture. Presto—tomato soup! Cost? Nothing. I sometimes had tomato soup four or five times a day."

That was the shape of life for most of the city's writers and for most of the city's people during the Depression. Times were not quite so hard for Woolrich, who had his mother's money to fall back upon, but they weren't easy either, and his stories of those bitter years give no sign that he felt secure. Whatever his personal finances might have been, he knew the desperation of the American people, and gave voice to their cries of pain as powerfully as any of the mainstream proletarian writers of the time. When it comes to putting us in the skin of a frightened little guy in a miserable little apartment with a hungry wife and children and no money and no job and fear of tomorrow eating him like a cancer, Woolrich has no peers. There is more of the anguish of the thirties in stories like "Goodbye, New York" (1937) and "Dusk to Dawn" (1937) and "Borrowed Crime" (1939) and "Murder Always Gathers Momentum" (1940) than in volumes of social history. The New York that Woolrich lived in like a hermit in a cave and wrote about like one who knew its every square block as well as he knew his own name is a city of subways, automats; movie palaces, cheap furnished rooms, cold stone streets, doorways thick with shadows, people sick with terror, loving, clawing, killing, smoking too much, drinking too much, each one trying and failing to keep at bay the certainty of death which marked Woolrich's work and scarred his life since that night in the valley of Anahuac. This was the world that he made come alive in all its feverish anguish in the pages of the thirties crime pulps.

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What led Woolrich to choose crime fiction as the arena for his new career will never be known. His autobiography says only that by the time in 1934 that he happened to see the movie he believed had been pirated from *I Love You, Paris*, he "was already starting on the way up again. . . . I had no time for last year's grief, I was too taken up in this year's hopes and plans." He was not at all well read in the mystery field and probably not in any other genre of contemporary popular fiction either. By today's criteria the 1932 *Manhattan Love Song* would be called a crime novel but apparently he never thought of it as such. One can almost imagine him opting to become a mystery writer by a random toss of the dice.

Late in 1946, when his suspense fiction had made him famous, the editors of a mystery magazine asked him how he had come to write his first crime story. In reply he spun yet another of his biographical tall tales, claiming that his entry into the genre was inspired by an impossibly noisy next-door neighbor in the Hotel Marseilles.

> So, one night while I was lying there, I started to think about what I would like to have happen to him. I didn't omit a single fiendish detail. The next day I wrote it down and had myself a murder story.
>
> I can't remember the name of that guy next door, and I probably wouldn't know him if I met him on the street. But if he remembers me, I want him to know that I owe him—well, let's say around fifty thousand bucks. He should just try and collect!

None of Woolrich's early stories in fact has anything to do with a noisy or otherwise repulsive man whose death is described in fiendish detail. But the sadistic edge one senses in the fabricated anecdote is found again and again in Woolrich's overt fiction.

However the choice came about, he started at close to the top. In 1934, among the dozens of gaudily illustrated pulp mystery magazines that overflowed America's newsstands, the three most vital and successful were *Black Mask*, *Detective Fiction Weekly* and *Dime Detective.* All three relied heavily on stories about series characters written by hard-driving established professionals like Max Brand, George Harmon Coxe, Carroll John Daly, Frederick Nebel, Raoul Whitfield and Erle Stanley Gardner. What the readers of these magazines seemed to be hungering for was tough talk and fast action. The likelihood that any of these pulps' editors would want to buy a mystery from a pale, puny, homosexual recluse who had wanted to be the next F. Scott Fitzgerald hovered close to the zero mark. In fact they wound up buying over a hundred.

Woolrich's first two sales in the field were to *Detective Fiction Weekly*, which had been on the stands under various titles since September of 1924 and would survive under various other titles until July of 1951. An ad for the magazine in the March 1932 *Writer's Digest* told the world loud and clear that its editors were not looking for new talent. "We make no effort to encourage promising beginners. We pay one and one-half cent a word and up for material accepted." The name of the far-sighted editor who bent company policy and bought those first two stories from Woolrich is not known for certain but it may well have been Duncan Norton-Taylor, who ran *DFW* for at least a good part of 1934. Whoever it was deserves our deepest thanks. He launched the career of our greatest writer of suspense fiction.

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On May 19, 1934, the magazine made out a check to Woolrich for $110 for first publication rights to his first crime story, which was printed about three months later. "There was another patient ahead of me in the waiting room. He was sitting there quietly, humbly, with all the terrible resignation of the very poor." Woolrich's new life began with these opening sentences from "Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, August 4, 1934), a Bizarre Murder Method tale firmly rooted in Manhattan geography and the choking desperation of the Depression era. The narrator, newspaper reporter Rogers, visits his dentist friend Steve Standish to have a cavity filled but has to wait till Standish has finished with the patient before him, a jobless and illiterate Italian immigrant—who dies of cyanide poisoning while in the dental chair. Rogers wears out shoe leather and brain cells and ultimately risks his life to prove that a rival dentist has framed Standish for murder. The casual mention of the police beating their innocent prisoner while he's in custody, and the race-against-time climax with Rogers frantically trying to get a poisoned filling removed from his own mouth before it kills him, prefigure countless similar scenes in later Woolrich stories. "I was carrying Death around in my mouth," the reporter tells us near the end, and if one is determined to find subtle traces of Woolrich's homosexuality everywhere in his work, one might as well begin here.

His next story, "Walls That Hear You" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, August 18, 1934), is much closer to his *noir* classics in its emotional power and narrative drive. "When the policeman came to the door and asked if Eddie Mason lived there I knew right away something had happened to him." The speaker is Eddie's older brother, an electrician with his own small shop on upper Amsterdam Avenue, and the forces of malevolence rip into his life when the policeman tells him that Eddie has been found on a lonely stretch of road near White Plains with his fingers cut off and his tongue severed at the root. Big Brother's grief-stricken quest for vengeance leads to another vivid evocation of Depression-stalked Manhattan and to another medical psychopath (although this one is modeled perhaps too closely on the mad scientists from early-1930s horror movies). The story features one of the genre's first uses of bugging equipment and some fine cliffhanger suspense at the climax.

Woolrich sold nothing more to *DFW* for well over a year, but during the rest of 1934 and all of 1935 he made several sales to the equally successful crime pulp *Dime Detective*, which had been launched by Popular Publications in November of 1931 and lasted for 274 issues, until August of 1953, by which time, although the name was the same, the cover price was a quarter. In its early years *Dime* favored powerful and even grotesque storylines, in which, to quote publisher Harry Steeger, "a murder [was] mysteriously committed before the eyes of the reader." At least in his first tale for the magazine, which he submitted as "The Cameras Focus on Death" and for which he was paid $102, Woolrich gave the editors precisely what they wanted. "Preview of Death" (*Dime Detective*, November 15, 1934) combines another Bizarre Murder Method with a Hollywood background stemming from Woolrich's abortive screenwriting stint at the tail end of the silent era. Narrator Jimmy Galbraith, the first of several dozen plainclothesmen protagonists in the canon, is assigned to bodyguard movie star Martha Meadows, who's been receiving threatening letters. But he's too late: in a shatteringly vivid scene, he witnesses her death when the flammable hoopskirt she's wearing for her part in a Civil War picture "accidentally" ignites and turns her into a living torch, "her life going up in blazing yellow-white gushes." As we've seen, this was how actress Martha Mansfield had died on the set of *The Warrens of Virginia* in 1923, and also how the actress Vodiska had died in Woolrich's 1929 novel *Times Square*. In this story, however, Galbraith stalks through the studio—giving us many close-up glimpses of the way movies were made at the dawn of the talkies—until he proves, as so many other cops were to do in later Woolrich tales, that the apparent accident was murder.

The second story the editors of *Dime* bought from him was submitted as "Angel Face," a name that recurs over and over in Woolrich's work. For this tale, which was published as "Murder in Wax" (*Dime Detective*, March 1, 1935), Woolrich recycled the situation with which he had ended the 1932 *Manhattan Love Song*: a married man is about to leave his wife for another woman, who is murdered just before they take off together, leaving him to be convicted and sentenced to die. Indeed, in both the novel and this story the dead woman has the same name, Bernice Pascal. But this time we see and feel the situation through the eyes of the condemned man's abandoned wife. "He always called me Angel Face," the story begins. But this is a destroying angel, the first and one of the strongest and strangest in the gallery of women Woolrich wrote about in first person. While her husband is waiting to be executed, she finds a matchbook monogrammed *TV* in the lining of his jacket and concludes at once, without the least rational basis, that her husband had picked it up in Bernice's apartment. Hoping to pin the murder on the mysterious TV, she tracks down Bernice's address book and finds the name and number of only one person whose initials fit. Then she makes her way into Tommy Vaillant's life as *ange noir,* complete with hidden apparatus for making wax phonograph records, offering him love and waiting desperately for the moment when he'll let down his guard and talk about his connection with Bernice. When it does, she is ready—and manages to turn the recording equipment on and off at just the right times to make his damaging but inconclusive admissions sound like a confession to the murder. Then, just before taking the record to the police, she tips off Tommy to leave town and avoid arrest. "I—I sort of liked you, Tom," she says. In an O. Henry twist at the end of the story which contradicts a great deal of what has gone before, we learn exactly why she let Tommy escape *and* how she knew her husband was innocent. The reason is that she killed Bernice Pascal herself. Woolrich was to play different variations on this theme in his 1937 story "Face Work" and in his powerful 1943 novel *The Black Angel.*

A month later, in "The Body Upstairs" (*Dime Detective,* April 1, 1935), which he had submitted as "The Body in the Bathtub," Woolrich gave *Dime*'s editors another of the grotesque murder scenes they loved. Once again the first-person narrator is a plainclothes cop named Galbraith, but this tale is set in New York and Woolrich never even hints that this detective is the Jimmy Galbraith from "Preview of Death." Our protagonist comes home from a hard day at the stationhouse, jumps into the tub for a quick bath before supper, and is pelted by drops of blood leaking through the ceiling from the bathroom of the apartment on the next floor. Investigating, he finds a dead woman in the upstairs tub, her head crushed to pulp by a flatiron. The prime suspect of course is the husband of the woman who lived in the apartment, and Galbraith at once starts brutalizing the man. Later down at the stationhouse, the police stick lighted cigarettes into the husband's armpits until he confesses. Galbraith, convinced by now that the husband is innocent, condemns not his colleagues but their victim! "If there's anything yellower than killing your wife, it's saying you did it when you didn't. Now try to snap out of it and act like a man even if you're not." This Yellowbelly theme will recur in Woolrich again and again. Eventually Galbraith clears the husband but the solution is wildly implausible.

The following month, in "Kiss of the Cobra" (*Dime Detective*, May 1, 1935), Woolrich crossed over for the first time into the realm of exotic horror. The setting is southern California, in the hills beyond San Bernardino, and demonic powers invade ordinary people's lives in a particularly wild and woolly way: the nameless narrator's widower father-in-law brings home as his new bride a Hindu snake priestess complete with snake! After several deaths and near-deaths in the family, the protagonist challenges Veda to a duel of poisoned cigarettes—murderous orality again?—which no one but Woolrich could have written. It's an insanely lurid and pulpy story that is somehow impossible to lay down unfinished. Woolrich submitted it under the hauntingly evocative title "Three Cigarettes in the Dark."

Building on their first success with *Dime Detective* and other magazines, the owners of Popular Publications had launched a new monthly in December of 1932, a periodical that went through three title changes and 158 issues before it died in October of 1950 but which is best known to pulpophiles as *Dime Mystery*. Publisher Harry Steeger said that the inspiration for the magazine "was the Grand Guignol theater in Paris," and the formula for pleasing its editor, Rogers Terrill, was summed up by one contributor as follows: "A fearful menace, apparently due to supernatural agencies, must terrify the characters . . . at the start, but the climax must demonstrate convincingly that the menace was natural after all." In 1935 Woolrich sold Terrill a story that knocked the formula into a cocked hat. "Dark Melody of Madness" (*Dime Mystery*, July 1935), much better known under its hardcover reprint title "Papa Benjamin," is a tale of pure *noir* horror, the first Woolrich tale to be told in third person, the first to center on an existential fugitive doomed by perverse fate, and the first to use the jazz motifs from his pre-crime fiction of the flapper era. From the opening paragraph we are transfixed by prose so vivid and visual that we feel we aren't reading a story, we're seeing a movie on the screen of our minds.

> At four in the morning, a scarecrow of a man staggers dazedly into the New Orleans Police Headquarters building. Behind him at the curb, a lacquered Bugatti purrs like a drowsy cat, the swellest thing that ever parked out there. He weaves his way through the anteroom, deserted at that early hour, and goes in through the open doorway beyond. The sleepy desk-sergeant looks up; an idle detective scanning yesterday's *Times-Picayune* tipped back on the two hind legs

> of a chair against the wall raises his head; and as the funnel of light from the cone overhead plays up their visitor like a flashlight-powder, their mouths drop open and their eyes bat a couple of times. The two front legs of the detective's chair come down with a thump. The sergeant braces himself, eager, friendly, with the heels of both hands on his desk-top and his elbows up in the air. A patrolman comes in from the back room, wiping a drink of water from his mouth. His jaw also hangs when he sees who's there. He sidles nearer the detective and says behind the back of his hand, "That's Eddie Bloch, ain't it?"

Bloch is a jazz composer and bandleader, a man at the top of his profession, but right now he's a living corpse, and the reason, as he tries to explain haltingly to the unbelieving detectives, is that he's been cursed by a voodoo cult for having stolen his latest and biggest musical hit from their ritual chants. In a long flashback episode, Eddie follows his traps and percussion man (who is rumored to have a touch of "colored blood") into New Orleans' Vieux Carré, inadvertently witnesses the cult's grotesque ceremonies, is caught, and has to choose between swearing loyalty to the cult, drinking blood from the same bowl with these grotesque blacks, or becoming their sacrifice. Eddie chooses life. The next day, back in his familiar world, he spits at and fires his drums and percussion man and renounces his forced baptism. "I'm a white man, see?" But the drummer thinks otherwise. "You're one of us. You think you're pink? Blood tells. You wouldn't have gone there—you couldn't have stood that induction—if you were. Look at your fingernails sometime, look in a mirror at the whites of your eyes. Goodbye, dead man."

Eddie demonstrates his liberation from the cult by turning its chant into the centerpiece of his new nightclub show and training his wife Judy to perform its ritual dance in the act. Then in his hotel bedroom he finds a little wax doll with a pin stuck in it, and from that moment forward he begins to die by inches. To any reader familiar with Woolrich's background it should be clear that at bottom this story isn't about voodoo curses at all, that its dynamics spring from Woolrich's sense of being trapped simultaneously in several cages—his mother's tyranny, his homosexuality, perhaps the Catholicism of his childhood, perhaps life itself—from which he couldn't or wouldn't set himself free.

In the later part of the tale, NOPD plainclothesman Jacques Desjardins, a creepy stoic who "goes around striking parlor-matches off the soles of stiffs," sets out to crack the cult and prove that the "curse" on Eddie has nothing supernatural about it, and for a while at least it seems that the story will stick to the *Dime Mystery* formula after all. But it doesn't, and in the end the malignant powers have their way. "Stand close to me, boys—real close to me," Judy says. "I'm afraid of the dark." This is one of Woolrich's most often reprinted stories—although usually bowdlerized to cut some of the racial slurs with which it abounds—and by all odds one of his most nightmarish.

On the heels of that spellbinder came a more or less lighthearted Woolrich whodunit, "Red Liberty" (*Dime Detective*, July 1, 1935), which returns us to New York and to first-person narration by a working-stiff plainclothesman. Denton, who is strictly a movies-and-beer man when it comes to entertainment, is bullied by his nagging wife into soaking up some highbrow culture on his day off and decides to do it by taking a tour of the Statue of Liberty, but he winds up having to play detective when a fellow sightseer goes into the body of the statue and never comes out. The setting inside and around Lady Liberty is meticulously vivid, and worked so well that Woolrich later wrote other tales around various New York locations. During the late 1940s there was some talk of collecting these stories in a book, but it never happened, and Woolrich's "landmark series" remains scattered throughout a pile of ancient pulps.

"The Corpse and the Kid" (*Dime Detective*, September 1935), better known under its hardcover reprint title "Boy with Body," is the first Woolrich crime story told in the third person and the past tense. More important, it's a stunning set piece of pure nail-biting suspense and *noir* atmospherics, ultimately rooted in the author's childhood trauma at the breakup of his parents' marriage and his father's involvement with other women. In a New Jersey seaside community, twenty-one-year-old Larry Weeks finds that his beloved father has killed his slut stepmother and frantically tries to cover up by wrapping the woman's body in a rug and carrying it across south Jersey to the roadhouse rendezvous where her lover is waiting to meet her. The account of the boy's journey with death under his arm is packed with the sort of tension long associated with the films of Alfred Hitchcock, and of all the stories Woolrich published in 1935, this is the one that points most clearly to the kind of work that was to make him famous.

Woolrich's last *Dime* story for the year was "Dead on Her Feet" (*Dime Detective*, December 1935), a bloodcurdling Noir Cop tale with a setting borrowed from pulp veteran Horace McCoy's breakthrough novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, which had been published earlier in 1935. Smitty, a violent, racist plainclothesman with a reputation as a petty chiseler and thief ("They tell me he darned near wrecked a Chinese laundry because the Chinks tried to pass him somebody else's shirts"), is sent out at 4:00 A.M. to close down without legal authority a dance marathon running in a deserted armory, only to find that one of the last dancers on the floor has literally died in her partner's arms. She was desperate to win the $1000 prize and had been dancing for nine days and nights, but it wasn't exhaustion that killed her: the ambulance doctor finds that she's been stabbed in the heart with a metal pencil while reeling dazedly around the dance floor. Smitty begins his investigation by publicly beating up the dead girl's dance partner and fiancé, and ends it, even though he knows by this point that the fiancé is innocent, by forcing him to dance with her corpse in his arms until he is literally driven insane. What was Smitty's motivation for this obscenity? He had none. Needed none. He's a cop. For Woolrich that means he is the earthly counterpart of the malevolent forces that rule our lives.

Late in 1935 Woolrich made two more sales to the magazine that had launched his new career. "The Death of Me" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, December 7, 1935) is a haunting and seminal story, the first of several he wrote on the theme of taking over another's identity and starting life afresh. The narrator, Walter Lynch, maimed economically and psychologically by the Depression, decides to kill himself so that his wife can survive on his insurance. On the way to his appointment with death he finds a body on the railroad tracks, its head pulped by a passing freight. The dead man is about Walter's size, and Walter succumbs to the temptation to switch identities with the body, so that it will be accepted as his own and he and his wife can start over together on the insurance money. Then he visits the dead man's hotel room, finds $42,000 hidden in a closet, and also finds that he's just inherited the people from whom the dead man took the cash—and who are ready to kill to get it back. The climax is borrowed from another *noir* classic, James M. Cain's 1934 *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, whose ironic denouement—the protagonist gets away with the murder he did commit but is nailed for a death he had nothing to do with—attracted Woolrich so strongly that he adapted it for his own purposes at least half a dozen times, beginning here.

"The Showboat Murders" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, December 14, 1935) is another Woolrich first: the earliest of the nonstop action whizbangs which punctuate his career in the pulps. The setting comes of course from *Show Boat*, Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern's blockbuster musical of 1927, which was being filmed around the time Woolrich wrote this tale. St. Louis homicide dick Whitey Ames takes his fiancée out for an evening on the showboat moored in the middle of the Mississippi, but the entertainment ends when Whitey slips out for a smoke during the show and interrupts a murderer trying to squeeze the leading lady's throat-slit body through a porthole. This triggers a magnificently vivid chase all through the boat and out onto the river, with Woolrich making us see everyone's physical movements in precise detail at each step of the frenzied pursuit.

Woolrich's last story of the year was his first appearance in *Argosy*, perhaps the most venerable of all the pulps, which specialized in adventure tales set in exotic lands but whose editors had no objection to the occasional tale of crime or suspense—nor to the Woolrich type of rapid-action whizbang. "Hot Water" (*Argosy*, December 28, 1935) is set in one of those south-of-the-border playgrounds where movie stars went to unwind in the transition time between the silent and talking eras. The narrator, Shad, which is short for Shadow, works as bodyguard to superstar Fay North (read Mae West). During one of Miss North's weekend excursions to the gambling resort of Agua Caliente she's kidnapped by gangsters and whisked off into the desert, with Shad and an impromptu posse in hot pursuit. That's all the plot Woolrich needs to give us a booming roller-coaster ride of a story.

These first thirteen pulp tales established Woolrich not just as a reliable professional mystery writer but as one with unique talents unmatched by anyone else in the field. His earnings in 1935 added up to $2,487, a sum on which in those days of depressed prices a man and his mother might live. By the end of that year he had made himself known to editors and readers and, more important, he had set in place a huge number of the building blocks of his *noir* universe.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In 1936 Woolrich stepped up production radically—twenty-six crime stories published that year as opposed to a mere ten in 1935—and his income from fiction rose to just above $4,300, almost twice what he'd made in his first full year as a pulp writer. Turning out stories in huge quantities and at white heat took its usual toll in the form of a certain number of ludicrous duds, but most of the twenty-six are quite readable and at least one-third of them rank among his most powerful shorter works.

The one crime pulp which bought steadily and consistently from him that year was *Detective Fiction Weekly,* where his life in the genre had begun. The editors of that magazine published fifteen Woolrich stories during 1936, including some of his best and some of his worst, and beginning with one of his most tautly suspenseful and little known. "Cigarette" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* January 11, 1936) carries forward the death-in-the-mouth motif from "Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair" and more specifically from "Kiss of the Cobra" but this time Woolrich uses it to keep us shivering in our seats without benefit of occult horror. Eddie Dean, a goodhearted schlemiel on the fringes of the underworld, is manipulated by Big John Bossetti into ingratiating himself with rival mobster Nick Miller. On the night the story takes place, Big John gives Eddie a cigarette case with a trick mechanism that ejects a Chesterfield or Camel each time it's touched, and tells him to go buy Miller a drink and offer a smoke to Miller *and no one else.* This of course is yet another Bizarre Murder Method from the Woolrich bag of tricks: the cigarette that will first be ejected from the case is poisoned. Having no idea that he's the patsy in Big John's murder scheme, Eddie goes along with the suggestion. But on the way to Miller's hotel around midnight he encounters on the street a man named Adams, a chain-smoker who discovered he was fresh out of cancer sticks just too late to buy a pack at the corner store before it closed. Goodhearted Eddie gives Adams two cigarettes from Big John's case to see him through the night. This act of generosity aborts the murder scheme, and later in the wee hours when Eddie learns the truth, we are thrust into a Race Against Time and Death as he pounds headlong through the nightscape trying to find and stop Adams before he lights up. Woolrich keeps the tension stretched drum-tight to the last page as his frantic protagonist chases the poisoned cigarette from one night-prowling tobacco addict to another. Why this gem of suspense has never been collected is as big a mystery as any Woolrich committed to print.

Two weeks later *DFW* published the much better known but much less interesting "Change of Murder" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, January 25, 1936), a doubly derivative story, with the character types and style lifted from Damon Runyon and the twist ending from Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Brains Donleavy sets out to kill his former buddy Hitch for making time with Brains's moll Goldie, but before rubbing the guy out he arranges to buy an uncrackable alibi from Fade Williams, who specializes in that area. As chance would have it, sentimental Brains is hornswoggled into sparing Hitch's life but winds up charged with causing another death of which for once he's completely innocent. It's a vividly enough written tale but the ironic ending is telegraphed miles in advance.

"Blood in Your Eye" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 21, 1936) is Woolrich at close to his worst, an insanely bad cop story set in an anonymous city on which he sticks the label Los Angeles. Mitchell, a rambunctious young second-grade homicide dick, is the only one who sees the truth when a murder victim is found in a rooming house with the image of his killer apparently imprinted on his eyes. Instead of sharing his insight, Mitchell throws down his badge in disgust at his colleagues' willingness to believe a medieval superstition and goes out to solve the crime lone-wolf style. The hunt takes him to two settings that Woolrich was to use over and over, a manicurist's booth and a dance hall. This is one of the most slapdash and laughable of Woolrich's pulpers—neither a roomful of cops nor the medical examiner can tell the difference between real and glass eyes!—but the climax is violent and the central gimmick Guignol-gruesome.

"The Mystery of the Blue Spot" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, April 4, 1936), which Woolrich submitted as "Death in Three-Quarter Time," is also based on a dumb gimmick. In three decades of reading mysteries I've never found a Perfect Alibi scheme as wacky as this one. Homicide cop Dennis Small happens to be in The Curfew Club on the night when Emilio, one of the specialty dancers, is shot to death in his dressing room just a few minutes after he and his partner Lolita have finished performing a bizarre new number. All the evidence points to Mary Jackson, a dancer in the chorus line, for whom Emilio was about to dump Lolita. Small proves that Lolita herself killed Emilio *before* the dance, then rigged herself in a crazy costume and went out into the spotlight and convinced a clubful of people that she was both herself and her partner! The story becomes interesting only in the scenes after Lolita's exposure, when Woolrich makes us empathize with her for two reasons crucial in the *noir* world: she had lost her love and she's about to die.

Next in *DFW* came one of the Woolrich's most stunning emotional thrillers, "Johnny on the Spot" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, May 2, 1936), a Race Against Time and Death story split between two protagonists—a man on the run through the night, and a terrified and deadly eighteen-year-old woman—and set in the streets and skyscrapers of New York in the hours before dawn.

> The clock on the wall of the cafeteria said quarter to four in the morning when he came in from the street. He wasn't even twenty-eight yet, Johnny Donovan. Any doctor in town would have given him fifty more years. Only he himself knew better than that. He didn't even have fifty days left; maybe only fifty hours, or maybe fifty minutes, depending on how good he was.

Hunted by the mob because he knows too much and wants out, Johnny is finally caught in that all-night cafeteria and about to be taken away to be tortured and killed, when his teenage wife Jean, a nightclub dancer, comes into the hash joint for one of her furtive wee-hours rendezvous with him and sees that the hit men have him. In the second half of the story we race with Jean through the darkness on a mad quest to kidnap mob boss Beefy Borden's wife and exchange her for Johnny—or, if it's too late for that, to kill her in turn. This is one of those heart-in-the-throat *noir* classics that no one but Woolrich could have written and that no reader can lay down till the last word.

Two weeks later came "Double Feature" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, May 16, 1936), one of the most vivid and breathless of Woolrich's action whizbangs, set from beginning to end in one of his most characteristic locales, an urban movie palace. Plainclothesman Bill Merrill takes his fiancée Betty Weaver to the show, only to find that the man in the seat on the other side of her is Squint Harman, the most wanted fugitive gangster in America—who then grabs Betty as his hostage and threatens to kill her if the police don't give him safe passage. On this peg of plot Woolrich hangs a memorable thriller, with action and emotions in perfect counterpoint.

"Nine Lives" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, June 20, 1936) is a never reprinted and hard to classify tale, set in the waterfront district around New York's South Street. Wheeler, demon newshawk, stumbles onto the story of an old bum who's been treated by three sinister strangers to booze, food, clothes—and to an insurance policy on his life. The best scene is where Wheeler is bound, gagged and left for dead at the bottom of an old-fashioned bathtub filling with water, but even in this serial-like incident there's nothing terribly urgent.

In "Dilemma of the Dead Lady" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 4, 1936), better known under its hardcover reprint title "Wardrobe Trunk," Woolrich takes some memories and details from the world cruise he took in 1931 with his mother and transforms them into a bone-chilling suspenser, making us live in the skin of a despicable protagonist and shudder with him through one of those nightmares that never end. In his cheap Paris hotel room, small-time American crook Babe Sherman strangles the young French woman he'd been using, and then is forced by a perverse chain of circumstance to stuff her body in his trunk and take it with him on his frantic escape from Europe. As if having a decaying corpse at his side weren't hair-raising enough, Babe next discovers that one of his fellow passengers on the boat train to Cherbourg, who also happens to be his roommate on the transatlantic crossing to New York, is a detective. Woolrich packs the story with so much moment-to-moment suspense, and compels us to agonize and empathize so deeply with his doomed and worthless character, that we can forgive him when he trots out the same old James M. Cain twist ending at the climax.

"The Night I Died" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, August 8, 1936) was originally published as by Anonymous, apparently in the hope that readers would take it for a factual account by its first-person protagonist, but no reader with the least sense of style could fail to recognize the Woolrich touch in this powerful, grotesque and suspenseful slice of *noir*. The setting is Kansas City and middle Missouri and the atmosphere is thick with the Depression and Cain influence. Ben Cook, a struggling and inoffensive clothing salesman, is brought home early by fate or chance on one particular evening—just in time to discover that his ruthless common-law wife Thelma, one of the few genuinely evil women in the Woolrich canon, has paid a passing hobo to kill him for the insurance policy on his life. While struggling with Cook over a gun, the hobo is shot in the mouth (here we go again, homosexual symbol seekers!) and killed. Thelma saves herself from a similar fate by enticing Cook into pouring a bucket of lye over the hobo's face, going underground, letting the body be identified as Cook's own, and starting life over on his half of the insurance. It's an insane scheme, full of holes, but Cook is as economically desperate as everyone else is in 1936 and agrees—and his endless nightmare begins. The storyline owes something to James M. Cain's then most recent novel, *Double Indemnity*, and even more to Woolrich's own "The Death of Me" from the year before, but this version of the tale is exceptionally well written and full of uniquely horrific touches (for example, the sex-death linkages in the scene where Cook, naked, strangles the man with whom he's been chastely sharing a hotel bedroom). By all odds this is one of the finest of the twenty-six stories Woolrich published during that feverish year.

"Murder on My Mind" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, August 15, 1936) is both a Noir Cop story and an Oscillation story; indeed, it's the earliest use in Woolrich, and perhaps the earliest in crime fiction, of a particular plotline which ultimately goes back to *Oedipus Rex* but is best known as a staple of forties and fifties *films noirs* like *So Dark the Night* (1946). Marquis, the detective narrator, is assigned with his partner Beecher to the brutal murder of a harmless cigar store clerk, but as the investigation goes forward, countless tiny details push Marquis and the reader closer and closer to becoming convinced that the murderer is Marquis himself. Woolrich's Living Nightmare classics like the 1940 "C-Jag" and the 1941 "And So to Death" are foreshadowed in this fine if a bit crudely written tale.

His third *DFW* story in three consecutive weeks was "Bluebeard's Seventh Wife" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, August 22, 1936), a long delirious thriller crammed with plot flubs and technical tricks and wild narrative drive. The narrator of the first half of the novelette is NYPD plainsclothesman Rich Dokes, whose naive kid sister Betty is about to marry Frank Hilton, a brooding stranger she's known for only a month. No sooner is the wedding over and the couple on their way to an Atlantic City honeymoon when Rich, whose feelings toward Betty are at best bizarre, connects certain peculiarities about his new brother-in-law and becomes obsessed with the certainty that Hilton is a notorious fugitive who under other identities has murdered six previous wives. Rich's next actions are nothing short of psychotic. He makes the house detective at the honeymoon hotel station a man outside the newlyweds' door with orders to break in on them at the first "unnatural" sound. He races to Atlantic City, shadows the couple, tries to poison Betty's mind against Hilton and succeeds only in making her hate himself. "Is that the only purpose you find in life, to spread fright and darkness around you, to send people to their deaths?" For Woolrich the answer is yes, that's a cop's function, he is God's embodiment on earth. When Betty and Hilton settle in an isolated furnished house on the beach, Rich secretly has a telephone installed there so his sister can reach him in a crisis. At this point Woolrich shifts gears and Betty takes over as first-person narrator for most of the rest of the story, an intense unputdownable Woman Menaced sequence. The headlong power of the writing all but defies the reader to notice the gaping holes in the continuity, and the incestuous overtones are even more disturbing than the boundless physical suspense.

The same breathless urgency and plotting gaffes permeate the novelette which Woolrich submitted as "Right in the Middle of New York," but it's so packed with action and tension that one barely notices that nothing in it makes sense, not even the published title, "Murder in the Middle of New York" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, September 26, 1936), since no murder is committed at all. Tony Shugrue, a relatively honest protege of mobster Chuck Morgan, is set up by his mentor with phony references and is hired by wealthy Cole Harrison as chauffeur for his spoiled and beautiful daughter Evelyn. Unaware that Tony is married, Evelyn makes several passes at her driver, and for a while we are reminded of the romance between another flighty heiress and her chauffeur in the 1927 *Children of the Ritz*. Finally Tony realizes that Morgan is planning to kidnap Evelyn, hold her for a huge ransom, kill her and leave Tony to take the fall, and from this point on the story turns into a wild roller-coaster ride, crammed with thrills, anguish and suspense as Tony fights to save himself and his wife and Evelyn from the gang. Some of the dialogue creaks beyond endurance ("'Rats!' he hissed viciously through his teeth. 'Lower than rats, even!'"), and the crucial scene requires Tony literally not to recognize his wife at close quarters, but the irresistible Woolrich urgency sweeps away all nitpicking into the ash heap. The Central Park setting for a bit of the action hints that Woolrich intended this never revived and unfairly forgotten story for his New York Landmarks series.

That series was clearly the proper locus of his next *DFW* offering, submitted as "El Train Murder" and published as "Death in the Air" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, October 10, 1936), a thrill-crammed whiz-bang set in and around the elevated railway system that stretched across Manhattan till the fifties. Late one evening, New York homicide cop Stephen Lively boards a Ninth Avenue El train bound for the Staten Island ferry terminal. As the train clatters through the Lower West Side, Lively witnesses a murder taking place in an upper-floor tenement flat whose windows are only a few feet from the track bed. He exits at the next station, walks the dark tracks back to the building where the crime took place, uses a plank to cross from the El structure to the flat's windows, finds a woman's body inside, then finds that the building is on fire. . . . The action in this one is furious, and the evocation of the Depression via the vignettes aboard the elevated train and seen through its windows is as mirror-vivid as anything in the Woolrich canon. The treatment of marijuana as a devil's brew prefigures his *noir* classic of five years later, "Marihuana."

"Afternoon of a Phony" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, November 14, 1936) is something of a departure for Woolrich, a charming, clever and bizarre whodunit in which the role of detective is played by a confidence man. Clip Rogers steps off a train at the Jersey seaside resort of Wildmore and is instantly mistaken by the brainless local cops for Griswold, the great sleuth from the state capital, whom they'd sent for to help solve the bludgeon murder of a woman in one of the town's vacation hotels. What complicates the case beyond the local hicks' powers to unravel is that the dead woman's eight-year-old son, who witnessed the crime in the middle of the night but is too young to understand its meaning, has identified as the murderer a man with a perfect alibi. Rogers exposes the real killer quite cleverly, but the story becomes distinctively the work of Woolrich only afterward when, as in "The Mystery of the Blue Spot," a criminal motivated by lost love takes center stage and, for a page or two, becomes a deeply sympathetic character. His comment that the impostor Rogers has more humanity than any cop he'd ever met is evidence that when Woolrich drew "real" cops as brutal thugs he wasn't doing it inadvertently.

His last *DFW* appearance of the year was also one of his weakest. In "The Two Deaths of Barney Slabaugh" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, December 26, 1936) Woolrich dusts off his favorite James M. Cain plot twist, backdates it forty years, and throws in so much of the tinny insult humor and gangster stereotypes from the current James Cagney movies that the illusion that we're in the New York of the 1890s isn't sustained for a microsecond. Emerald Eddie Danberry, Manhattan racket king, is persuaded by his shyster lawyer, Horace Lipscomb, that the proper way to kill rival mobster Barney Slabaugh is to take Barney prisoner, frame himself for the man's murder before the deed is done, and get himself acquitted in court. Then, Lipscomb explains, even if Danberry were to murder Barney in full view of a thousand people he could never be prosecuted for it. What is the name of this marvelous rule of law? Why, it's the Statute of Limitations! Fighting District Attorney Barry McCloy, one of the few uncorrupt officials in the city, tries to snooker the plot, and fate works another Cain trick to help him out in this super-pulpy tale, which is replete with police brutality, casual racism and enough Woolrich-style wisecracks to sink a battleship.

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The second steadiest publisher of Woolrich stories during 1936 was *Argosy*, which offered readers six of his tales, of which four took place outside the United States and two—one a classic, the other eminently forgettable—were set close to home. "Crime on St. Catherine Street" (*Argosy*, January 25, 1936) is a lighthearted whizbang in which wealthy young Manhattanite Ted Hewitt makes a bet with two drinking buddies that he can use his brains to survive in a strange city for a week and, to prove his point, boards the next train to Canada and gets off at Montreal with precisely 75¢ in his pocket. He bluffs his way into a suite in a fancy hotel, then on the street picks up a woman named Margot and invites her to a show, but soon discovers that she and her accomplice Louie are planning to roll him. Just for the fun of the thing Hewitt pretends to fall in with their scheme, but eventually the plot turns sour. Louie kills Margot but the police are convinced the murderer is Hewitt, who finds himself in the position of the standard *noir* protagonist: penniless, friendless, hunted through the dark night of the city by forces determined to kill him. This time however Woolrich plays the situation purely for thrills and laughs, and the result is an adventurous urban romp more or less in the vein of the Indiana Jones movies.

We don't know when, or if, Woolrich ever visited Montreal, but he did visit Paris on that world tour with his mother, and "Underworld Trail" (*Argosy*, May 16, 1936), like the *DFW* classic "Dilemma of the Dead Lady," stems from his time in the City of Light. This item though is no classic but an acceptable quickie, narrated Runyon style in first person present by one of a pair of American sailors who hop a freight from Le Havre to Paris for forty-eight hours' liberty and stumble smack into an opium ring and a kidnapped girl from the States. Nothing in the story ever makes sense but it's sort of fun in a goofy way. Woolrich submitted it as "Passy 22-40."

The indispensable Woolrich contribution to *Argosy* that year was "You Pays Your Nickel" (*Argosy*, August 22, 1936), better known under its hardcover reprint title "Subway," a tale clearly meant to be part of his series-in-progress about crime in distinctive New York settings. The protagonist, subway guard Delaney, is bored stiff at his job because nothing ever happens in the underground trains—God, what a change fifty years have made!—until a homicidal maniac boards his car one morning, and suddenly Delaney is part of a hair-raising *mano a mano* in the bowels of the earth as the train carrying the two of them and hundreds of screaming commuters and a valise containing $50,000 in stolen money careens out of control through the underground tunnels. This is simply one of the greatest action stories ever written, a heartstopping whizbang so vividly told that you are *there*, spang in the middle of the fireworks, and you stay there until the last sentence, by which time Woolrich has wrung you dry.

"Gun for a Gringo" (*Argosy*, September 5, 1936) is the earliest of a number of tales Woolrich wrote about various macho Americans living and working in one or another banana republic south of the Rio Grande. The local color in these stories obviously stems from his childhood memories, and more likely than not the adventurous protagonists are based (however loosely) on his father. This time the first-person hero is Steve Willoughby, a former Chicago gangster now residing in the land of Costamala and working as bodyguard for the country's dictator, one-armed Presidente Savinas. As Woolrich Coincidence would have it, it's none other than Willoughby who's approached by a band of scruffy revolutionaries—a breed of whom the author's opinion had changed not an iota since the 1930 novel *A Young Man's Heart*—and offered mucho dinero to assassinate Savinas during an official banquet. Steve plays along in order to catch all the conspirators red-handed, but is caught in his double agent act and railroaded into the state insane asylum. After enough time in the madhouse for Woolrich to make full use of the place's *noir* potential, Willoughby escapes and, in a blaze of action, tears back to the city trying to save El Presidente's life. The story works well on a simple cliffhanger level but quite poorly as a Race Against Time and Death because Woolrich gives us no reason to care whether or not the one set of corrupt politicos is ousted by the other. As usual in these Gallant American Abroad sagas, the racism is thicker than the heat and stronger than the plot.

Anyone who doubts the influence on Woolrich of then current movies should be forced to wade through "Public Toothache Number One" (*Argosy*, November 7, 1936), a semihardboiled comedy about a bill collector, obviously modeled on Jimmy Cagney, who makes a dunning call on a certain dentist just in time to be mistaken for that fellow by the henchmen of the country's most wanted criminal—who's in hiding and suffering from a ferocious ulcerated tooth! These gangsters are so dumb they let our hero fill their hideout with carbon monoxide fumes from an auto on the pretext that it's a form of anesthesia. Enough said. Woolrich submitted this one as "Toothache."

Woolrich closed out his sales to the magazine that year with the kind of exotic adventure yarn with which it was identified. "Holocaust" (*Argosy*, December 12, 1936) takes place on the island of Santo Domingo during the French Revolution and deals with a bloody slave revolt against white tyranny. The female lead is eighteen-year-old Aurelie Blanchard, daughter of the owner of the Mon Repos plantation, a *jeune fille très naive* who admires Voltaire and opposes the whipping of slaves and says of blacks, echoing the words of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* about Jews: "Do they not laugh as we do, weep as we do, bleed when cut, draw breath as we do?" In this story the answer is no. They are a savage tide, a horde of repulsive brutes in loincloths and Jacobin caps, screaming for victims to torture, spouting Robespierre slogans and war cries and voodoo chants all in the same breath, every single black on the island except for the story's Uncle Tom figure, Aurelie's faithful old nurse Marthe who saves her life. In the first and most vividly conjured-up sequences, Mon Repos is besieged. As for its four white defenders—Aurelie, her mother, her fiancé Robert Lemaitre, and the sadistic yellowbelly overseer Picard—the older woman kills herself, the younger is buried alive, and the two men are taken prisoner. In the story's middle stretches the plantation is burned to the ground and Lemaitre and Picard tortured by the black fiends, but Aurelie turns the tables by rising from her open grave and masquerading as a zombie, and the two Frenchmen manage to boil the rebel leader in a vat of wax before they and the girl escape into the jungle. In the final reels, as the three are creeping through the foliage to the Spanish part of the island and safety, Picard suddenly goes haywire and carries Aurelie off with him while Lemaitre is pinned under a clinging vine. This long and ultra-lurid novelette is readable enough but nowhere near as vividly written and felt as the *noir* classics Woolrich set on his home turf. Clearly however his views on third world revolution hadn't changed an iota between *A Young Man's Heart* and this adventure.

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The five remaining Woolrich crime tales published in 1936 were of wildly varied quality and appeared in magazines whose quality ran the gamut in the same way. The first of the quintet to see the light of print was so unimaginably awful it may well be the single worst story he wrote during his fifteen-year prime. Popular Publications' mild success with weird-menace pulps like *Dime Mystery* had inspired rival entrepreneur Ned L. Pines' Thrilling Publications to launch a competing monthly. *Thrilling Mystery Magazine* debuted in October of 1935 under editorial director Leo Margulies (1900–1975), who was to spend his entire career at the helm of one cheap pulp or another, and who was still reprinting all-but-forgotten Woolrich tales in his *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* in the last years of the author's life. During the fifty issues it survived, *Thrilling Mystery* offered a parade of strange cults, diabolic rituals, gruesome mutilations, sadistic villains, slavering beasts and (of course) women shivering in peril. Woolrich dipped his toes into these weird waters only once, which was once too often. "Baal's Daughter" (*Thrilling Mystery*, January 1936) follows the same general storyline as the 1935 classic "Dark Melody of Madness"/"Papa Benjamin" and the 1937 classic "Graves for the Living" insofar as all three are about hapless innocents falling into the clutches of repulsive religions. But this version of the story is so sloppily and luridly written, so overloaded with stupid inconsistencies and grotesque twaddle, that to claw one's way through its pages is an act of masochism. Narrator Bob Collins visits a psychiatrist friend, Dr. Dessaw, to ask for help in freeing his fiancée Gloria Warren's dotty aunt from a Westchester cult. As Woolrich Coincidence would have it, the head of the cult is Dessaw himself, who drugs Bob and spirits him to the religion's headquarters mansion on the banks of the Hudson, where in rapid order our hero is stripped to his shorts, flogged by a tongueless black giant, menaced by a man-eating panther (a cousin of whom will dominate the 1942 novel *Black Alibi*), tortured with boiling oil injected into his veins, forced to kneel before a woman calling herself the reincarnation of the goddess Ishtar, forced to help lure Gloria to the mansion for a ritual mating with the god Baal (who of course is Dr. Dessaw) and a quick drop into a fire pit, and so on and so on long past our endurance. The narrative throbs with clunkers like "The fiend on the throne stood up and turned to me as I quivered there, ashen-faced" and "I was prone there, at the mercy of the he-devil and the she-devil. . . ." Here is a Woolrich tale that deserves every bit of its obscurity and then some.

Within a few months after cranking out that hunk of junk, Woolrich made a tentative gesture toward coming back, if only for a moment, into the realm of mainstream writing. In the mid-1930s *the* magazine for authors and connoisseurs of serious short fiction was *Story*, which had begun in Vienna in 1931 as a homemade mimeographed publication and had moved to New York in 1933 with its husband-wife editors, Whit Burnett (1901–1973) and Martha Foley (1897–1977), who reconstituted the periodical in Manhattan under the auspices of Bennett Cerf's Random House. Between 1931 and 1941, while Burnett and Foley were married and edited *Story* together, they published quality fiction by such first-rate American writers as Norman Mailer, William Saroyan, J.D. Salinger, John Cheever, James T. Farrell, Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers and Nelson Algren. *Story* offered a standard rate of $25 per tale. No one got rich appearing in it, but if you were serious about the form, you desperately wanted to be in its pages. Sometime late in 1935, Woolrich applied to join that select company.

When she died in a small furnished apartment in Northampton, Massachusetts, Martha Foley was working on an autobiographical memoir which was published in book form three years after her death as *The Story of Story Magazine* (1980). At the end of her life she was eighty years old and writing about events forty to fifty years behind her. It's no wonder that her narrative is studded with factual mistakes. (She tells us, for example, that Rex Stout's mainstream novel *How Like a God* came out in 1933—the correct date is 1929—and that the first of his Nero Wolfe mysteries was *The League of Frightened Men*, which actually was his second.) But she did remember, however incorrectly, the day *Story*'s office within the Random House complex was visited by Cornell Woolrich.

"I had never heard of him," she said—for she and Burnett had been expatriate journalists in Paris and Vienna when Woolrich's early mainstream fiction had been published in the States—but she described him as a "thin, shabby, shaking, hungry-looking man," and that recollection was right on the mark.

"If I send you a story," he asked her, almost imploringly, "will you please read it?"

"Of course," she told him. "That's why I'm an editor."

Reassured, Woolrich told her about his background as a literary boy wonder of the Jazz Age. Some at least of what he told her was either a lie or misremembered by her well over forty years later. She recalls him saying "that there was a long hiatus in his writing after winning the [$10,000 *College Humor*] prize [for *Children of the Ritz*], and that when he resumed writing his work was rejected." Perhaps this was her dim recollection of the *I Love You, Paris* incident of 1933. "I remember his telling me of how his father had left his mother," she said, which was true enough, "and of how, as a boy, he had spent years with her roaming around the country in search of his father." The latter incident, as far as we know, never happened at all. "I have never forgotten his leaning forward to me and saying earnestly, 'A search for a father is a search for God.'" There is no reason to doubt Foley's memory of that, which sounds very much the sort of thing Woolrich *would* have said.

The balance of her memoir of Woolrich is riddled with further mistakes. She describes the manuscript she says he sent her, but in fact what she remembers is the *second* of the two tales Woolrich sold to *Story*, and by the time she had seen *that* manuscript she would certainly have heard of him before. The work he actually sent her after that meeting, or perhaps even handed her on the spot, was one of his best pieces of short fiction on its merits and one of the most important in terms of his development. "The Night Reveals" (*Story*, April 1936) is the earliest example of that uniquely Woolrichian type of tale, the oscillation thriller, in which the protagonist is being eaten alive by the possibility, then the mild likelihood, then the probability, then the near certainty, then the total certainty that the person closest in the world to the protagonist—husband, wife, roommate, best friend, lover—has done or is doing or is about to do something unspeakable. Woolrich makes us undergo this dark night of the soul with insurance investigator Harry Jordan as he learns that his wife Marie has been slipping out of their Lexington Avenue apartment in the hours before dawn, and begins following her through the ghostly city streets, and soon comes to suspect that a kiss from perverse fate (or as Hammett would have put it, from a falling beam) has turned her into a pyromaniac. Is he right? In some of the oscillation stories the protagonist's fears and suspicions are justified and the climax is tragic, but in others they are dead wrong, the result usually of a ridiculous chain of coincidence, and the ending is more or less happy. And since there are no series characters and no ground rules in Woolrich, the suspense is *real* and our own uncertainty matches that of the people on the page. In short, reader, if you don't already know "The Night Reveals," I am not sadist enough to spoil for you this or any other of Woolrich's oscillation stories by giving away how it all comes out. But anyone who reads it in the expectation that it's in a different category or on a higher level of seriousness vis-à-vis the best of Woolrich's fiction for the pulps is in for a rude awakening. The tale is more carefully written than what he offered to *Detective Fiction Weekly* or *Argosy* or *Dime Detective*, but the cinematic vividness with which he captures the New York nightscape, and the sights and sounds and smells of buildings on fire, and the emotional torment of his characters, is identical to the vividness in his finest pulp stories. "The Night Reveals" is a stunning piece of writing, but its appearance in a prestige literary magazine did nothing to restore Woolrich to what had once been his place in the mainstream.

His single 1936 contribution to *Dime Detective* hit the stands within two weeks of his first tale in *Story*, and "The Living Lie Down with the Dead" (*Dime Detective*, April 1936) is likewise a gem—of the ghoulish and grotesque. A wealthy and cracked old recluse, having long ago converted all her holdings into a fortune in diamonds, dies wearing the wedding gown she never wore in life so that she'll be ready for her tryst with the only faithful bridegroom in the world. Her will specifies that the jewelry is to be buried with her in the family mausoleum at Cedars of Lebanon Cemetery. Chick, a grimly moronic thug, gets the inspiration to substitute his even more subhuman partner Angel Face (there's that name again!) for the body in the coffin as part of a mad scheme to lift the death jewels from the crypt. The result is a strange amalgam of Poe and Damon Runyon, a chiller drenched with black humor in which Woolrich employs for the first but by no means the last time the motif of burial alive.

A few months later he appeared in another bottom-rung pulp edited by Leo Margulies, but this time the story is much better than its package. In its long drab life of about ninety issues, from 1933 to early 1953, *Black Book Detective Magazine* offered a single tale by Woolrich, "One and a Half Murders" (*Black Book Detective*, July 1936), an eerie *noir* whodunit in which we are meant never to know for sure what really happened. Mike Travis, a middle-aged private investigator let go by his agency because of the Depression, comes to Atlantic City to help Frank Murray, his sister's son, who's in jail, charged with having capped his poor boy–rich girl romance by strangling heiress Sylvia Reading with the shoulder straps of her evening gown and throwing her body into the ocean from the veranda outside the dance pavilion on the Million Dollar Pier. As sadistic and psychotic as any of Woolrich's official cops, Travis launches a campaign to terrorize another of the dead girl's suitors, whom he spots as a yellowbelly, into confessing to the murder and then committing suicide. This is Woolrich's image of justice: one innocent person exonerated by the wanton destruction of another who maybe, just maybe—by the climax all the evidence is so jumbled up we can never know for sure—was innocent too. If it wasn't for the scrawled confession which Travis coerced the second man into signing, the police commissioner tells him at the end, "we'd have had half a case of murder against you yourself for whatever it was you did to him made him jump out the window like he did. In fact, for all I know, we probably still have at that—but I'm not going to do anything about it. . . . I suppose all that matters is results. . . ."

One of the least popular of the Popular Publications pulps was *Ace-High Detective Magazine,* which lasted a mere seven issues, from August 1936 through February-March 1937. Its editor, *Dime Detective*'s Ken White, included in his fifth number an extremely obscure Woolrich tale entitled "Evil Eye" (*Ace-High Detective,* November 1936). It's the earliest of several stories he was to write about the encounters of various plucky and mischievous young boys with death and terror, but this one unlike its successors is played almost entirely for comedy. Bronx plainclothesman Dan Kieran takes his eight-year-old son Danny to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see a newly unearthed mummy with a priceless emerald eye. The orb is supposedly protected by an ancient curse that whoever tries to steal it will be blinded by the god Osiris. Danny slips away from his dad at closing time and is locked in the museum—as are two dimwits nicknamed Jojo and Donkey Mouth who plan to steal the eye during the night. Woolrich tells almost none of the story from the viewpoint of the boy, the way he would in his later tales of this sort. Instead he concentrates first on making us laugh, as we watch the thieves' comic interplay (which is oddly prophetic of some of the classic scenes between Jackie Gleason and Art Carney on TV's *The Honeymooners*) and the bungling efforts of Danny's father and a helpful traffic cop to break into the museum and rescue the rambunctious brat, and then on making us shudder as the gory curse is fulfilled. Not at all a bad story—and a worthy addition to Woolrich's New York Landmarks project.

CHAPTER NINE

1937 was a banner year for Woolrich in more ways than one. He had more short crime fiction published in magazines than in any other year in his creative life—an astonishing thirty-six stories, some long enough to be called novelettes or short novels—and collected a total of $7,765, more than he ever made from his shorter work before or after. It was also the year he first sold movie rights to one of his suspense stories, although the money was pitiful: $448.75 (after deducting agents' commissions) for letting Columbia Pictures make what turned out to be a wretched B programmer, *Convicted* (1938), from his pulper "Face Work." Perhaps most important of all, it was the first year that his byline appeared in the undisputed king of pulp mystery magazines, *Black Mask*.

The history of that periodical has been recounted with varying degrees of accuracy in dozens of books and articles on the crime genre, and there's no need to cover the ground in detail here. It was founded soon after World War I by H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan as a commercial venture into general popular fiction, first hit the stands in April 1920, was quickly sold off by its founders at a nice profit and, as the twenties went on, was converted gradually into the *locus classicus* for the tough, terse, cynical, distinctively American kind of mystery that will forever be identified with Dashiell Hammett. Much but by no means all of that conversion took place under the editorship of Joseph Thompson "Cap" Shaw (1875–1952), who ran *Black Mask* for the ten-year period, starting late in 1926, that many consider the magazine's golden age. Clearly there was no place in Shaw's macho vision for an intensely subjective and emotional writer like Woolrich. Then, late in 1936, Shaw was fired and, in what must have seemed to him the unkindest cut of all, was replaced in the editorial chair by a woman. Fanny Ellsworth (b.1904) brought to the job not only her sex but several years of experience editing pulps like *Ranch Romances*, and clearly one of her goals was to soften, at least a little, the stoical, laconic, objective, understated image that Shaw had created. She had no objection at all to thrillers laced with emotion—and within a month of taking over the reins she was buying stories of that sort from Woolrich. During 1937 a total of eight Woolrich stories were published in *Black Mask*. By the standards pulp mystery writers of the time applied to themselves and others, the frail, gaunt, haunted recluse had suddenly become a giant.

He debuted in the magazine with "Shooting Going On" (*Black Mask*, January 1937), which was precisely the sort of emotion-laden story that Cap Shaw would have rejected in two seconds flat, with a Hollywood background based on Woolrich's brief stint at First National and a premise no one but he could have dreamed up. The protagonist is young Ken Blaine, whose wife has risen overnight from obscurity to instant screen stardom as Ada Alexander. As the story opens, Ken is sitting in his and Ada's lavish high-rise apartment, drinking, brooding over his plight as the forgotten and neglected half of the partnership, and—even though he's hopelessly in love with her—ready to walk away from the marriage. Ada comes home from the studio, bringing with her the script of her new picture and a pistol loaded, she says, with blanks. She asks him to help her rehearse the big scene in which the movie husband accuses his wife of infidelity and shoots her. They begin shouting back and forth the couple's bitter argument in the script, their voices loud enough for the servants to overhear. Then Ken aims the little pistol at Ada, fires—and she falls over dead. The servants and the police refuse to believe his story and accuse him of premeditated murder. Blaine bolts for freedom, knocks his hissing Japanese butler unconscious—"'Give my regards to Nagasaki when you come out there!' he whispered viciously"—leaps Doug Fairbanks style over the balcony of his terraced apartment to the balcony below and eventually makes it out of the building. Where does he go to hide? At the studio! He conceals himself in the offices of Ada's director Krassin, and, gawp in disbelief if you will, persuades Krassin to cast *him* in a major role in the picture, which, gawp again if you will, is to begin shooting the next morning with another actress already signed for Ada's starring part. What scene is to be shot that morning? That's right, the scene where the husband accuses the wife of infidelity and shoots her. For absolutely no reason on earth, Blaine, whom Krassin has cast as the husband, substitutes the genuine still-loaded murder weapon for the prop gun he's given, and lets the actress taking Ada's place see him make the switch. Then the two repeat the lines of the deadly argument from the script, and at the proper moment, Blaine aims the same gun at this woman that he had aimed at Ada and killed her with. As the cameras continue to roll, the replacement actress cracks and confesses on the spot, her motivation being the same as that of the murderess in Woolrich's first Hollywood mystery, the 1934 "Preview of Death." The contrivances he resorts to in order to make the last and first scenes echo one another are laughable, but the story zips along furiously and the emotional impact never lets up. Woolrich recycled the opening scene in one of his later noncriminous stories, the 1949 "Husband."

He was back in the next issue under Ellsworth's editorship with "Murder on the Night Boat" (*Black Mask*, February 1937), an action whizbang set on the passenger vessel connecting Manhattan and Albany and clearly intended as another New York Landmarks tale. The shipboard honeymoon of NYPD detective sergeant Jim Bradford and his screech-voiced bride is cut short when first another passenger and then *his* bride are stabbed to death in a stateroom down the hall. The rest of the story recounts Bradford's running gun battle through the ship against a trio of hit men. The action is first-rate and the background events as told to Bradford by the woman victim before her death are full of *noir* touches, but Woolrich insists on making his people funny whenever the guns are silent, and his tinny notions of insult humor quickly grate on the ear.

"I'll Never Play Detective Again" (*Black Mask*, May 1937) is a very strange story even for Woolrich and stranger still for *Black Mask*, even under Fanny Ellsworth. It's supposed to be taking place in the present but its ambience is unmistakably that of the fizzy 1920s, with the background full of debutante parties and bright-eyed Princeton and Dartmouth boys and slang like "cake eater," so that one suspects Woolrich first wrote it in his Jazz Age period and later overlaid it with a thirties veneer before placing it with *Black Mask*. Narrator Dick Walsh and his best friend and roommate Tom Nye—who are strongly reminiscent of Alan Walker and *his* roommate Dale Evans from 1926's *Cover Charge*—attend the glittering engagement party celebrating Tom's forthcoming marriage to wealthy Marcia Planter. The festivities turn sour when Marcia's teenage sister falls dead while dancing in Walsh's arms. What killed her was a poisoned rose from the bouquet Tom Nye had brought to the party. Walsh makes a pest and an ass of himself tagging along with the police as they backtrack the deadly flower. How the rose came to be poisoned turns out to be one of those freak Falling Beam accidents we encounter so often in *romans et contes noirs*, but by the time the truth comes out, Walsh is himself poisoned—by the obsession that his best friend and roommate is a potential homicidal maniac—and in the final scene, even though Tom has killed no one, Walsh more or less forces him to commit suicide, leaving an even crazier character alive to tell us as the story ends that the trouble with playing detective is that you find "crawling things under the stones you turn up." What might have been a stunning *noir* story sinks under the weight of Woolrich's awful attempts at humorous dialogue.

When a Malayan maharajah, his American bride, his American bodyguard and a native servant check into a New York luxury hotel in the middle of the night, along with a mountain of luggage and a pet monkey and three cases full of jewels, the stage is set for "Mimic Murder" (*Black Mask*, June 1937), a feverish and wildly paced tale which manages to be an action whizbang and a Bizarre Murder Method story, with house detective Keller at the forefront of both strands of the plot line. The gimmick is pretty hard to swallow, but the vivid glimpses of wee-hours hotel life, the touches of black comedy and the atmosphere of casual racism and brutality make this one of the more interesting of Woolrich's forgotten pulpers.

"Nellie from Zelli's" (*Black Mask*, September 1937) is another Gallant American Abroad tale of the sort we'd expect to see in *Argosy*, with a tone of lighthearted comic adventure which Woolrich likely borrowed from the English Hitchcock films of the period. In that fateful year 1929, Brad Mitchell arrives in Paris and makes a blind date with an American girl named Nellie about whom he knows nothing but her phone number, but when he reaches the rendezvous he's mistaken for a member of some murky conspiracy that's afoot, and before long both he and his Nellie are neck-deep in a political assassination plot. At bottom this is a fun-and-thrills version of the same story line Woolrich reworked to much greater effect three years later in the *noir* classic "Finger of Doom."

"Face Work" (*Black Mask*, October 1937), which sold to Columbia Pictures as the basis for a B movie almost as soon as it hit the stands, is the second of the tales that form a sort of verbal bridge between Woolrich's 1932 novel *Manhattan Love Song* and his 1943 novel *The Black Angel*. Like its forerunner, the 1935 "Murder in Wax," this one is narrated in first person by a woman and spins off from the *Manhattan Love Song* climax. New York stripper Jerry Wheeler, frantic to keep her kid brother Chick out of the clutches of torch singer Ruby Rose Reading, begs each of the lovers in turn to abandon their plan to go off together to Chicago, but strikes out with both. That evening, a few hours after Chick has left to pick up Ruby Rose at her decadent apartment, Jerry receives a visit from tough police detective Nick Burns, who tells her that Ruby Rose has been strangled and Chick arrested for her murder. After he's convicted and sentenced to die, Jerry desperately takes up a new identity as she races the executioner's clock to prove that Ruby Rose was murdered not by Chick but by some other man in her life. The man Jerry has in mind is Militis, the sinister nightclub baron so often found in B movies and pulp fiction, a sadist who enjoys branding his women on the hip with a hot poker. In order to get the evidence she needs to save Chick's life, Jerry assumes the name of Angel Face, wangles herself a torch-singing job at Militis's club, and deliberately sets out to entice him into betraying himself. The ambience and dialogue overflow with tough-guy mannerisms and insult humor but the basic storyline, improved by countless emotional and psychological refinements, was to become the basis of *The Black Angel* six years later.

"Cab, Mister?" (*Black Mask*, November 1937) is another Hardboiled Dame story, narrated by the kind of tough, wise-mouthed female who may turn on certain feminist ideologues but turns off almost everyone else. The protagonist, Virginia O'Dare, is Manhattan's only woman cabbie, and as usual, Woolrich wants us both to empathize with her (because all her male competitors harass her) and to dislike her intensely (because she's not above taking fares the long way around to their destinations). One night outside the New York Athletic Club she picks up a customer who wants to go to the North River piers. When she gets there, she finds that he's been shot to death in the back seat during the trip. The story features a few characteristic Woolrich touches—the dying man hands his wallet to a streetwalker in the last moments of his life, the police threaten to have matrons beat O'Dare with a rubber hose—but simply doesn't have the urgency, vividness, action, suspense and *noir* coloration it sorely needs, and does have all too much of Woolrich's insult humor. (Cop to O'Dare: "Remind me to borrow your razor sometime." O'Dare: "If it's to cut your throat)".

His last appearance in the magazine that year and by far the finest of the first eight that Fanny Ellsworth bought from him was "Dusk to Dawn" (*Black Mask*, December 1937), a *noir* classic in which Woolrich makes us live in the skin of a hunted and doomed protagonist running headlong through the nightscape of the city. It's the kind of story only Woolrich could write so vividly and wrenchingly, and he rewrote its basic situation again and again, for example in the 1940 "Murder Always Gathers Momentum" and the 1941 "Marihuana." The main character this time is Lew Stahl, twenty-five years old and jobless and literally penniless, who opens events by sneaking into a New York movie palace without a ticket very much as Woolrich himself had done in the pit of the Depression. The mezzanine is deserted except for one man, who seems to be asleep in his seat. Lew tries quietly to lift this man's wallet and take out a dollar bill to buy a meal but discovers to his horror that the fellow isn't asleep, he's dead—with a knife in his back. A woman several rows behind them in the darkness is convinced she saw Lew kill the other man and runs for the police. Thus begins his long, harrowing, anguished race through the nightbound city, stalked, desperate and predestined to destruction, for in his flight for life he steals a gun, and then uses it, and then makes his second unbearable discovery of the story: that he *likes* using it, likes being an executioner instead of a victim, likes being a living beam that falls on other innocents. The ending is too rushed and rather bland after the wild intensity of all that has gone before, but "Dusk to Dawn" is still one of the most powerful *noir* stories Woolrich ever wrote.

Among the other mystery writers whom Fanny Ellsworth brought into *Black Mask* for the first time were Frank Gruber and a young ex-sailor named Steve Fisher (1912–1980), who like Gruber found fame and fortune in Hollywood after several years in the pulps. Gruber and Fisher became buddies, and both of them saw Woolrich now and then. Gruber's 1967 memoir *The Pulp Jungle* includes a few glimpses into the life of his reclusive colleague.

> Woolrich was an introvert who lived with his mother at the Hotel Marseilles on upper Broadway and left the hotel only when absolutely necessary. He shunned parties and social gatherings, but Steve Fisher and I got him out to a party one night. The next day I got a call from Fanny Ellsworth. "What did you fellows do to Cornell Woolrich last night?" she asked.
>
> "Nothing," I replied. "We got him to take a couple of drinks, that's all." [As if alcohol were a novelty in Woolrich's life!]
>
> Fanny went on: "He came tearing in here this morning yelling that I was paying Gruber, Fisher and [Roger] Torrey four cents a word and he was getting only one and a half cents and he was never going to write for the magazine again!"
>
> I didn't recall that we had told Woolrich that little fib about our word rates, but we could have done so.

It wasn't the only time Woolrich became enraged over the possibility that other writers were being paid more than he was. Luckily he got over his snit fit, continued sending stories to *Black Mask*, and remained among its writers for several years after Fanny Ellsworth left.

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If *Black Mask* was the most prestigious crime pulp that published Woolrich during 1937, his most reliable market that year as in 1936 was *DFW*, whose editors ran eleven of his tales, ranging from superb to flawed but fascinating to mediocre to awful, but beginning with one of his best. "The Corpse Next Door" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, January 23, 1937), which he had submitted simply as "Next-Door," is a spine-freezer in which Woolrich pushes us inside the skin of a man with a guilt-flayed conscience and makes us live his torments, somewhat as Poe did in "The Tell-Tale Heart," but adds further layers of angst by setting his story amid the quiet despair of the Depression. Harlan, a faceless nonentity scratching out a meager white-collar existence, is driven mad with fury by the invisible thief who regularly steals the bottle of milk from the stoop of his drab apartment before he and his wife get up in the morning. He sets a trap for the thief, kills the man in a blaze of wrath, hides the body in the innards of the closeted Murphy bed in the vacant apartment next door—and his concience begins slowly but inevitably to drive him over the edge. The ironic twist in the final paragraph works much better than most Woolrich endings of this sort and caps the story perfectly.

"Blue Is for Bravery" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 27, 1937), which Woolrich had submitted as "The Police Are Always with Us," is a rather short and almost plotless but desperately urgent Noir Cop actioner with a viewpoint rare in the canon. Young harness bull Danny O'Dare, one of the few honest officers in a corrupt city, happens to be on night duty at the wrong place and time and witnesses the city's political boss and his goons leaving the apartment building where they've just beaten a man to death. When Danny refuses Benuto's $5,000 bribe for keeping his mouth shut, Benuto has Danny's pregnant wife kidnapped. For the rest of the story, Danny goes berserk. He beats up other cops, tortures Benuto in a precinct station backroom, careens madly across the nightscape in a Race Against Time and Death to rescue his wife before the deadline at which the gang will kill her—and for once in a Woolrich story our reaction is undivided and we are completely and uncritically behind whatever is done by a protagonist with a badge.

"Round Trip to the Cemetery" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 27, 1937) is another of Woolrich's grotesque underworld tales more or less in the same category as "The Living Lie Down with the Dead." The premise is crazy as a coot but Woolrich manages to generate a rich atmosphere of gallows humor as a shyster lawyer and a quack doctor rig a plot to free convicted gangster Bull Bradley. They arrange for a pickpocket accomplice to take a ride on the same train that is bringing Bull to the state pen, sit in the seat behind the mobster and quietly puncture Bill's rear end with a hypodermic full of germs (homosexuality symbol hunters take notice!), in the expectation that the prison doctor will become convinced he's dying and release him into the custody of his "mother," who of course is a phony. This insane plot actually works—until the quack doctor discovers that Bull really *is* dying from the injection. Then Bull finds out too, and the story mutates into a bizarre race by a living dead man to take two other men into the grave with him. Once again Woolrich inserts an O. Henry–type twist in the last few paragraphs but this one is even crazier than the plot elements that have gone before.

"Wake Up with Death" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, June 5, 1937), which Woolrich had submitted as "Binge," begins with a scene of perfect *noir*: Don Stewart wakes up in an unfamiliar hotel room with a king-size hangover, no memory of the past twenty-four hours, and on the floor by his bed the dead body of a woman whom he's never seen before but whom his best friend insists Stewart had married during the night. Then the room phone rings, and a voice claims that he saw Stewart kill the woman from the window of his own room in the hotel's opposite wing. It's a fascinating tale, a sort of rough sketch for the 1942 classic "Rear Window" but with the apparent woman-killer the innocent protagonist, the binoculars-wielding witness a blackmailing punk, and the scene confined to the room of the former not the latter. The plot gimmick with the numerals on a hotel-room door was also recycled, many years after "Rear Window," in 1959's "The Number's Up."

In "If I Should Die Before I Wake" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 3, 1937), Woolrich projects himself for the first time into the mind and heart of a preadolescent boy, and gives us one of the most chilling suspensers in the literature. The narrator is eleven-year-old Tommy Lee, son of a plainclothesman, full of pluck and adventurous spirit. Not believed by his tyrannical father and sadistic teacher and never aware of the full implications of what he's doing, Tommy runs off alone into a vividly evoked nightworld, half *film noir* and half fairy tale, to save a girl classmate from the clutches of a child molester. Tommy's *mano a mano* with the monster in the deserted old house in the forest is a masterpiece of sustained tension, with a last-minute rescue which Woolrich, knowing that he's writing a fable, makes not the slightest effort to explain in rational terms. The moment at the end when Tommy's father beats the captured molester almost to death demonstrates once again Woolrich's ambivalence toward official sadism and his genius for forcing ambivalent responses out of us.

"Vision of Murder" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 17, 1937), which Woolrich had submitted as "Wrong Timing," is a strange one indeed, never reprinted but well worth a few moments of our attention. When a solitary named McAvoy is bludgeoned to death with a fireplace poker in his room in a boardinghouse on West 50th Street, one of the NYPD detectives assigned to the case is energetic dimwit Benjy Benson. After following normal police routine and getting nowhere, Benson comes up with a bizarre approach which in fact has been emulated in recent years by many a department in the real world: he drafts into the investigative team a psychic whose performance he'd seen in a vaudeville show. Sure enough, when the grotesque medium Freddie is taken to the murder room, he claims to experience "vibrations" that give him the name of the killer and of the woman over whom the crime was committed. Benson tracks down the woman only to find that he and Freddie have solved the wrong murder. The story is burdened by Woolrich's inept attempts to be archly funny but the subtext is both strong and dead serious. The idea of a room in which the same violent events are more or less repeated at intervals also inspired Woolrich's 1938 novelette "Mystery in Room 913."

"Somebody on the Phone" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 31, 1937) is the earliest of Woolrich's handful of short-shorts, and quite effective too. When a young woman inexplicably jumps out an apartment window to her death after being tormented by a phone caller who rings five times and then hangs up, her revenge-obsessed brother (could he be more than a brother to her?) tracks down and riddles with bullets the man he blames for her suicide. Then he goes home—and the five phone rings start in again. This senseless vignette perfectly mirrors the randomness and menace of the Woolrich world.

"Murder Story" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, September 11, 1937) is likewise a bit of an experimental novelty for Woolrich, a technically tricky tale-within-a-tale that never jells as a whole but is rich in fascinating parts. The first scene marvelously evokes the world of a man of New York and of the night, a man who lives in isolation and drinks a lot and smokes a lot and makes his living writing mystery stories for the pulps. We don't know how much of this scene is autobiographical but it's so vividly described we can hardly resist the temptation to say it must be. The plot Woolrich attaches to the milieu is pretty humdrum. Tucker, the pulpster narrator, takes twelve hours of nonstop labor at the typewriter to bat out a yarn, the tale within the tale, in which an author murders a rival scribe, who had cheated him, by substituting a bottle of lethal liniment for a stomach tonic. Just before Tucker mails the yarn to his pulp editor he picks up the evening paper—which tells of the death of a well-known author after having mistakenly swallowed some deadly liniment. In due course a homicide dick named Bradford calls on Tucker and begins playing a game of cat and mouse with him which culminates in Tucker's arrest for the murder. As they're leaving for the precinct station, Tucker gets a letter from his editor, rejecting the tale within the tale as totally implausible. Which is precisely what is wrong with the outer story too! Woolrich never bothered to give his protagonist a *plot* reason for converting his "real-world" murder scheme into a story but, as in "Shooting Going On" earlier in the year, rigged up a sloppy contrivance in order to create his ironic counterpoint between fiction and reality. When Woolrich tries to get fancy he usually stumbles over his own feet.

"You Bet Your Life" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* September 25, 1937), published two weeks later, is one of Woolrich's most eccentric efforts, a cockeyed philosophic parable with roots in the Book of Job. The narrator describes a bizarre wager between two acquaintances named Fredericks and Trainor. The cynical and ruthless Fredericks bets a thousand dollars that any man randomly picked on the street will kill another randomly picked person if given sufficient motive. The idealistic Trainor, who can't afford to lose the money, is bullied into taking the opposite end of the wager. Along with the narrator, the two men sit at midnight in the back seat of a taxi parked near Times Square and toss out successive halves of a $1,000 bill. The narrator follows each of the randomly selected human guinea pigs to his home after that person has picked up his half. Fredericks then sends letters to each, revealing the other's name and address, and the three godlike principals in the story invisibly spy on the two mortals and wait to see which will first set out to kill the other. At the climax, as if to demonstrate its power over all other gods, Chance takes a hand in the game, but the upshot is indeed that someone dies. This unfairly forgotten tale proves once again the huge variety of Woolrich's short fiction.

"The Lie" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* October 9, 1937) is a weak retread of the premise from 1935's "The Corpse and the Kid"/"Boy with Body." Both stories begin with a young man about twenty years old returning unexpectedly to the family's beach home to find that his beloved father has murdered his slut stepmother. This time around our boy, whose name is Martin Delavan, tells the tale in first person, but the result is literally a tale told by an idiot—and I don't mean Marty! Despite a mountain of physical evidence implicating the kid's father, this time Dad turns out to be completely innocent; and instead of trying to dispose of his stepmother's body like his 1935 forerunner, Marty frames himself for the murder, and fools every cop on the case except one. This hopeless mess climaxes with one of the Stupid Murder Trial sequences which dot the Woolrich canon. He submitted this farrago under the title "Sure I Killed Her!"

Woolrich's last *DFW* appearance that year was "The Gun But Not the Hand" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* December 4, 1937), a Bizarre Murder Method story set in a weakly evoked rural South and replete with dialogue like "Rip the electric cord out of that lamp, darky, and tie him to the sofa with it." Tom Benedict, a poor white squatter, has been tried and convicted for the murder of banker Anselm Stoddard while the two were alone and arguing on the Stoddard sun porch. The night before Benedict is to hang, Atlanta homicide detective Wade Desbrosses wanders through the area, takes an instant interest in the case, and just as quickly figures out who framed Benedict for the murder and how. The story's Bizarre Murder Method was not devised by Woolrich himself but lifted bodily from one of the best-known American short crime stories, Melville Davisson Post's "The Doomdorf Mystery" (collected in *Uncle Abner, Master of Mysteries,* 1918). And to prove how found of the gimmick he was, Woolrich recycled it again four years later in his suspense novel *The Black Curtain.*

At the end of "Vision of Murder" the editors of *DFW* ran a letter to them in which Woolrich told once more the familiar tale of how an infected heel had turned him into a writer and then briefly described his professional procedure. "Haven't changed my typewriter since I began. Writing hours and habits very irregular. Always do a story in longhand first, as I can't type 'cold.' This takes a lot of time, but if I try to hurry, am I lousy! Maybe I am anyway." Voilà! One more divided reaction.

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Argosy, which had published six Woolrich stories in 1936, ran six more in 1937, most of them quite unconventional even when not of the highest quality. The first and last of his *Argosy* tales for the year are connected by centering on that most Woolrichian of subjects, death. "Speak to Me of Death" (*Argosy,* February 27, 1937) is one of the most powerful stories he ever wrote on that or any other theme, generating edge-of-the-seat suspense with one of those races against the specter of Anahuac which ultimately none of his characters and none of us in the world beyond the page can win. Into police headquarters at 9:00 P.M. on the thirteenth of the month stumbles Ann Bridges, young and wealthy and terrified almost to the point of gibbering idiocy. With tough but sympathetic Lieutenant McManus as her audience she describes how her millionaire uncle, John Bridges, has become obsessed by a penniless drifter named Jeremiah Tompkins, who seems to be able with uncanny accuracy to foretell the future—and who has prophesied that in exactly twenty-seven hours, at the precise stroke of midnight, Bridges will die a horrible death by the jaws of a lion. At the end of Ann's story McManus is convinced that Bridges is the victim of an elaborate extortion scheme and sends out a small army of plainclothesmen to find naturalistic explanations for every instance of Tompkins's apparently preternatural power. Young detective Tom Shane is assigned to take Ann home and protect her and her uncle. As the hours and minutes approach midnight, Woolrich crosscuts between the detectives hunting for rational answers—and sometimes, it seems, finding them—and the dread mounting at the Bridges mansion as the doomed one who stands for all of us comes closer and closer and closer to the moment when he knows he will die. By the time the clock strikes and brings with it the unbearable climax, we no less than the characters are shaking and quivering in the dark. Eight years later Woolrich expanded this story into one of his longest and finest novels, *Night Has A Thousand Eyes.*

The first half of the unusually short "Your Own Funeral" (*Argosy,* June 19, 1937) is saturated in the ambience of Cagney gangster flicks and the poetry of *noir* as the police close in on, evacuate and shoot up the Washington, D.C., apartment building where fugitive gunman Champ Lane and his wife are in hiding. The bizarre vividness of the early scenes soon peters out and we close with a conventional rehash of Woolrich's premature-burial theme.

"Clever, These Americans" (*Argosy,* July 3, 1937) is another of Woolrich's tales of hapless Anglos in the steamy Latin American environment of his childhood, but this time it's a Biter Bit story, not a prototype of an Indiana Jones adventure. Frisco, a bank robber on the run, fetches up broke in a nameless banana dictatorship, tries to rob the richest and fattest politico in town, gets caught and is tossed into the *calabozo.* While in jail he and the town's only other Anglo, a drunken disbarred lawyer, concoct an idiot plot whereby Frisco will slip out of his cell, rob the fat politico again, slip back into his cell and wait for El Gordo to admit to the local *policia* that he had accused the wrong man of the first robbery. As usual in Woolrich, the fickle finger of fate messes up the scheme. The story is remarkable only for one or two vivid descriptive passages and an ambience of sardonic racism.

An infinitely nastier sort of racism pervades Woolrich's next *Argosy* tale, "Black Cargo" (*Argosy,* July 31, 1937), whose plot line—brave white man caught in the middle of a slave revolt battles to save his own life and that of a young woman with naive notions of black-white brotherhood—is a seaborne rehash of the previous year's "Holocaust." On a sailing ship of the late 1700s, its stinking hold choked with several hundred slaves bought on the coast of Africa, we meet Davey Pritchard, a young Virginian who has taken up the nautical life in search of glamour and excitement, and lovely Mary Lowrie, who is homeward bound on the slaver after the wreckage of another vessel but detests the exploitation of the black race with all her moral strength. In a quarrel with Pritchard she quotes Rousseau and asks: "And would it be a crime if they did free themselves? What right have you and the others to carry them away from their homes into slavery?" Woolrich describes the question as a "typical bit of feminine logic" and has Pritchard tell her: "If these savages were freed," their first move would be to cut the throats of every white on the ship. When a black girl whose life Mary had saved repays her kindness by sneaking into the hold and releasing the hundreds of slaves, the blood pours hot and fast and the endless description of the blacks in subhuman terms is validated along with Pritchard's prophecy. "They were swarming all over the doomed ship like ants; bigger than ants, like death-dealing maniac apes." The rest of the story is nonstop frenzied action as Pritchard shoots, stabs, blows to a pulp, bludgeons to jelly and even outthinks the swarm of devilish darkies in his frantic struggle to keep himself and Mary alive until another white ship passes their way. What makes this adventure tale a huge improvement on "Holocaust" is that the writing is much more vivid and intense and, perhaps more important, that Woolrich at least half-heartedly tries—by stressing over and over in the first part of the story the horror and wretchedness of the slaves' condition and the brutality of the white officers—to generate the sort of divided reaction that fuels his contemporary *noir* thrillers. But the author is still all too vehemently in the white slavemasters' corner, and this is one Woolrich story that is guaranteed never to see the light of print again.

If nothing else, these historical actioners demonstrate his extreme versatility as a writer, and he provides another object lesson in "Oft in the Silly Night" (*Argosy*, November 13, 1937), a comedy of criminous errors set in a small northeastern village in 1908. Mac, the local constable, tries bravely to solve the mystery of the "ghosts" terrorizing the medieval château which toothpaste mogul Mortimer Griggs has had taken apart in France and reconstructed as his country estate. Mac is very close to the kind of character the young Bob Hope often portrayed, putting on a great show of bravado to cover his natural chickenheartedness, and his adventures in the transplanted château are vivid and funny enough to keep us reading and chuckling to the end. This is one of Woolrich's few attempts at humor that come off, and it's a shame the story hasn't been reprinted in half a century.

Woolrich is the last writer in the world from whom we'd expect a meditation on the gentle loveliness of death, but that is precisely the theme of his last *Arogsy* tale of the year, "Guns, Gentlemen" (*Argosy*, December 18, 1937), which he submitted as "Twice-Trod Path." Stephen Botillier, son of a wealthy New Orleans merchant, grows to manhood in the shadow of his heroic ancestors and becomes obsessed with the portrait of his great-granduncle, also named Stephen Botillier, who died overseas in mysterious circumstances at the age of twenty-five. Graduated from college, the modern Stephen goes off on a world tour and, on his twenty-fifth birthday, finds himself in the Ruritanian principality of Danubia—a place which he's never seen before in his life but whose geography and language are somehow familiar to him. At dawn the morning after his arrival, he fights a duel with an evil nobleman for the love of a breathtaking young woman who seems to have known and been enraptured by Stephen forever. It's a hauntingly romantic story of déjà vu and reincarnation, and its treatment of death as transfiguration shows us that, at least for the hours or days it took Woolrich to write the tale, he had overcome the specter that stalked him all his life.

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Dime Detective's Ken White ran only three Woolrich stories during 1937, a pair of forgettable quickies bracketing one of the finest pure detective stories that wretched man ever wrote. "Blind Date with Death" (*Dime Detective,* June 1937), which Woolrich had submitted as "Butch the Gigolo" and for which White had paid him $114—roughly two cents per word—is a minor pulper almost completely lacking in urgency or interest. Hulking NYPD detective Bill Armstrong is assigned to pose as a gigolo and wangle a job with an escort service linked to the theft of jewelry from several middle-aged women eager for nights on the town with youthful paid companions. The only virtue of this item is that it's quite short.

"Murder at the Automat" (*Dime Detective,* August 1937) is perhaps the only genuine Locked Room mystery in the Woolrich canon—and an excellent one too, with its stunningly original plot situation, vivid picture of New York in the worst of the Depression, and fairness to the reader in the tradition of Ellery Queen. Homicide dick Nelson tackles the case of Leo Avram, an old miser who came into the Automat every night just before midnight for coffee and a bologna sandwich, until the night the sandwich behind the coin slot he chose turned out to be laced with cyanide and killed him. Woolrich powerfully evokes the seedy Automat and the night people who call it home, along with a gorgeous plot and even the characteristic touch of a police threat to frame the prime suspect when they can't figure out how anyone could have poisoned precisely the sandwich the victim selected and no other. Clearly Woolrich intended this tale for his New York Landmarks series. It's not only one of the best in that group but one of the best of his career, and one of the few in the canon that will appeal to those who dislike *noir* and demand hard-core detection that makes sense.

"Stuck with Murder" (*Dime Detective,* October 1937) is unlikely to appeal even to Woolrich's staunchest admirers. A killer frames an innocent man for a murder by switching the knobs on the dead man's and the frame-up victim's hotel-room doors, but detective Burke scotches the scheme with the unwitting help of an Irish slattern who works in the hotel as night chambermaid. Woolrich submitted this one as "By Gum" and was paid $65 for it. It can be read in five or six minutes and forgotten in three.

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The Street & Smith pulp magazine empire was the last major periodical chain to begin buying stories from Woolrich regularly. The first tales which the S&S editors bought from him were run not in any of the company's famous magazines but in *Pocket Detective,* a new publication which was launched in December of 1936 and died in October of 1937 after eleven issues. In his second number editor Robert Arthur, a prolific pulpster in his own right, included one of the true classics among Woolrich's unknown and uncollected tales. "The Heavy Sugar" (*Pocket Detective,* January 1937) is a suspense masterpiece, full of tension and anguish and the look and feel of Depression-era New York, and the earliest of the several *noir* thrillers in which the hunted and doomed Woolrich protagonist flails headlong through the hostile nightscape, usually but not necessarily always to his destruction. Down to his last nickel, nursing a rancid cup of coffee in a hole-in-the-wall cafeteria on Eighth Avenue in the blackest hours of the night, Tom Keogh happens to observe another customer who is surreptitiously inspecting the sugar bowls on each of the cafeteria tables. Idly Tom plunges his own coffee spoon into the bowl on his own table—and snags a diamond necklace. Within minutes he's being hunted through the empty canyons of the night, unable to call the police or even to hide in the subways or a flophouse, yet wealthier than the vast majority of the residents of New York. A perfect *noir* situation and one only Woolrich could exploit as powerfully as he does here.

Two months later Arthur published "Humming Bird Comes Home" (*Pocket Detective,* March 1937), an unusually short story told from the point of view of a blind farm woman, Ma Adams, whose son Ben, a gangster on the run, nicknamed The Humming Bird because of his unconscious habit of humming "St. Louis Blues," returns to the home farm for the last time before his inevitable death. It's the earliest of several stories in which Woolrich assumed the viewpoint of a physically handicapped person, usually someone blind, and therefore had to create his vivid atmospheric effects without ever appealing to the sense of sight. This one isn't terribly suspenseful but overflows with emotion and psychological subtlety. Are we to see the gangster son as a stand-in for Woolrich himself, giving form to the self-contempt that sprang from his homosexuality and physical weakness and his career in the lowly pulps, verbalizing his fear that his beloved mother was ashamed of him? In any event it's one of the most haunting of his very short stories.

The third and last of Woolrich's appearances in the short-lived magazine was "Death in Round Three" (*Pocket Detective,* April 1937), a murder-in-the-ring story rich in boxing atmosphere and concentrated sadism. The big match has been fixed but the challenger Donner doesn't take the dive he's supposed to and is raining blows on the champ O'Dare, when suddenly during the third round O'Dare is shot in the back. The murder gun is found on the narrator, punch-drunk excontender Barney Carpenter, whom O'Dare had beaten up on several occasions, not all of them in the ring. Hallett, a sadistic police detective, carries on the good work, leading a squad of cops who punch and kick Carp into confessing—at which point Hallett recalls one little detail, concealed from the reader, and realizes he's torturing the wrong man. Woolrich recycled the "Carp" character, or more precisely the name, in his better known noncriminous boxing story "The Blue Ribbon" twelve years later.

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Each of five other magazines ran a single Woolrich story during 1937, three of them among his finest and the other two at least of some historic interest. The earliest of the quintet to hit the stands appeared in Popular Publications' weird-menace pulp, *Dime Mystery.* "Graves for the Living" (*Dime Mystery,* June 1937) is a powerhouse novelette bursting with suspense and emotional upheaval and perverse religious overtones and distinctively Woolrichian motifs. Its plot looks back in some respects to that of Woolrich's earlier *Dime Mystery* story, "Dark Melody of Madness"/"Papa Benjamin"—the protagonist in each tale stumbles into a cult that protects its secrets by psychological terrorism and murder—and in other respects looks forward to "Goodbye, New York," the third of the quintet, insofar as each shows us a fugitive couple desperately trying to break through the enemy's dragnet and catch the freedom train. But the shadow from the past that hangs over this story most darkly is that of "The Living Lie Down with the Dead" and the other nightmarish early tales Woolrich wrote on the theme of being buried alive. Bud Ingram, haunted since childhood by the fear that someday he will be lowered into earth while still breathing, as his father was, has developed the habit of prowling through graveyards, tearing himself to shreds as he wonders how many of the dead were still alive when they were entombed. One afternoon on a drive through the countryside he slips into an enclosed private cemetery to wander among the gravesites, only to discover that each of the plots is fitted with pipes to let air into the coffin beneath. He is caught by the groundskeepers and taken before the leaders of The Friends of Death, a religious cult that promises immortality to all the faithful and unspeakable torments to the unbeliever. An echo from the Catholicism of Woolrich's youth? The cult is run by a trinity and seems to have eyes and ears everywhere in the world outside. To save himself from being buried alive, Bud follows the example of Eddie Bloch in "Papa Benjamin" and commits himself to the religion. The rest of the story makes up a single anguish-fraught chase sequence as Bud and his fiancée Joan first try to get help from the police—and fail, because the department has been infiltrated by the cult—then frantically try to escape from the city, which is also packed with zealots out to get them, and finally are wrenched apart when Joan turns herself over to the cult to be buried alive in his place. The religious parallels here are no more inadvertent than earlier in the story. In the depth of the night the police overpower Bud while he's racing madly from one cemetery to another, tearing up grave after fresh grave in his search to find her burial place before her air supply runs out. The captain in charge not only believes every word of Bud's crazy story but mobilizes his entire command to raise recently buried coffins and even has acid poured on one of the cultist cops in order to make him talk. This scene takes place offstage, but in a single paragraph Woolrich manages to make it unbearably chilling. ("A muffled scream sounded somewhere near at hand in the muffled stillness. The door suddenly flew open and the captain came running out alone . . . [B]ehind him came the sound of a man sobbing brokenly like a little child. . . .)" After enough shudders and grue to give the most hardened reader nightmares, Joan is resurrected from her tomb and the cult smashed. Its faithful, Woolrich tells us, will be meted out a dreadful punishment indeed, namely the knowledge "that somewhere, sometime, their graves awaited them." A *noir* classic.

The next of Woolrich's five singletons is a hopelessly rushed and pulpy Bizarre Murder Method tale, published in one of the feebler of the dozens of crime magazines with which newsstands of the thirties abounded. *Ten Detective Aces* had been launched by pulp czar Harold Hersey under the name of *The Dragnet* back in 1928. Nine years, two name changes and one publisher later, its editors ran the only story they ever bought from Woolrich, "Taxi Dance Murder" (*Ten Detective Aces*, September 1937). Williams, a former police reporter down on his luck in Depression-ridden Los Angeles, takes an interest when hoofer "Blackie" Moore, who rooms in the same boardinghouse upstairs from him, comes home from the night shift at the Melody Lane dime-a-dance mill and drops dead on her bed. The next day the police discover that what killed her was embalming fluid and that Williams had once worked in a funeral parlor. While Williams goes into hiding, Blackie's ex-roommate Trixie Travers tries to find her pal's killer by taking over her job at the Melody Lane. Having no evening gown of her own, she borrows the cheapie Blackie had worn when she died—a gown which Woolrich asks us to believe the police examined and then returned to the boardinghouse without ever noticing that it was saturated with, you guessed it, embalming fluid! There are dozens of other plot screw-ups in this item, but it moves like a bat out of hell and is historically notable as a rough sketch for one of Woolrich's 1938 classics, "Dime a Dance," whose alternate title comes straight out of something Williams tells Trixie: "You're going to be a dancing detective."

A month later, Whit Burnett and Martha Foley published the second and last of the *noir* gems Woolrich sent them. In her autobiographical memoir Foley described it as "a skin-prickling tale of two people who have committed a crime . . . told in writing far superior to that of the usual thriller." Apparently one of the movies Woolrich saw on its first release was *You Only Live Once,* Fritz Lang's classic about a doomed fugitive couple (Henry Fonda and Sylvia Sidney), which had come out in January of 1937. As we've seen, Woolrich used the Fugitive Couple motif in "Graves for the Living" just a few months later, and in "Goodbye, New York" (*Story,* October 1937) he made it his centerpiece. Although he borrowed the idea from Lang, his treatment was uniquely his own. Woolrich's version is set in the streets and subways and railroad tunnels of New York City and told in first person from the viewpoint of the young woman whose husband has killed his corrupt ex-boss and taken $500 from his house, just enough to enable the couple to start life over. The story follows their frantic attempt to evade the police net closing around them and get out of the city, "their stratagems to avoid detection, their near-captures and their terror," to quote Martha Foley. It's an edgy, feverish heartbreaker, with scenes in the IRT subway and Penn Station that defy us to forget them. "Two doomed things, running away. From nothingness, into nothingness. . . . Turn back we dare not, stand still they wouldn't let us, and to go forward was our destruction at our own hands." What a perfect image of life in the Woolrich world!

In a letter to Foley and Burnett printed in the back of the issue containing this tale, Woolrich said that he had

> been writing professionally since 19, a year before I left college. Which is only mentioned to prove that people will rush into print before they have anything to say. Published six books without it being at all necessary. Now, after five years of doing nothing but short pieces, I finally have a novel which is crying to be written, but find I cannot afford the luxury of six months or a year without an assured income. Probably haven't the gambler's instinct. My idea is to do it in some quiet place where they don't have taxis and subways; give it a break; let it be born with a gold spoon in its mouth. And that costs money.

Two flat lies this time: he'd been twenty-two, and not nineteen, when he began "writing professionally," and as of the fall of 1937 he'd been writing "short pieces" for a little more than three years, not five. But what are we to make of that "novel which is crying to be written"? Was he already toying with what grew into his first suspense novel, *The Bride Wore Black*? Was he thinking about a new mainstream novel which might restore him to the literary glory he had once thought was rightfully his? Or was he just giving words to a vagrant dream?

In the fall of 1937 the venerable Frank A. Munsey pulp house brought out a brand-new monthly, *All-American Fiction*, which sold for 15¢ and, judging from both the contents and the cover artwork of its debut number, offered readers all the current types of entertainment story in one package: war, Western, sports, jungle, frozen North, undersea, Oriental, everything but rockets to the moon. Among the authors featured in this issue were Donald Barr Chidsey, H. Bedford-Jones, Richard Sale, Borden Chase, the ubiquitous pulpster Max Brand—and Woolrich. "I'm Dangerous Tonight" (*All-American Fiction*, November 1937) is the longest story that haunted man wrote during the year—almost seventy pages in hardcover—and one of his few overt ventures into the supernatural. Like most of his major novels of the forties, it's divided into episodes connected by a single link, in this case a red and black dress imbued by Satan himself with the power to turn anyone who wears it or even touches it into a murderous psychotic. Could this be a metaphor for the homosexual man's perception of women as Wholly Other, or was Woolrich just desperate for a peg on which to hang an episodic story? He intertwines this premise with a hoary pulpish counterplot in which intrepid Federal agent Frank Fisher carries on an international war against the dope smugglers who killed his kid brother. Fisher encounters the diabolic dress on three separate occasions and on three different women—a Paris model, an Iowa housewife on board an ocean liner, a girl singer in the narcotics gang's standard Sinister Nightclub hangout—and if you swallow that triple coincidence you might manage to enjoy this hokey novelette. In any event it's a fertile source for bits and pieces that pop up in Woolrich's later fiction: for instance, the poor girl who steals the fancy dress from its owner foreshadows a moment in *The Black Angel*, and the scene where Sarah Travis entices her husband off the top deck of the S.S. *Gascony* is replayed in the memorable balcony murder in *The Bride Wore Black*.

The same month *All-American Fiction* debuted on the stands, the Munsey company also launched a more conventional single-genre pulp, *Double Detective*, which was a bit more successful but not much, surviving as a monthly until November 1941 and as a bimonthly until its death in March of 1943. The first issue of *Double* likewise featured Woolrich, but with one of the shortest tales he ever wrote. "Waltz" (*Double Detective*, November 1937) captures all the inexplicability of the *noir* universe in a single scene. We are at a lavish coming-out party in the mansion of a tycoon. The millionaire's ultra-naive young daughter is about to elope with a strange man she's known for just ten days (shades of the 1936 "Bluebeard's Seventh Wife"), and the house is surrounded by cops waiting to grab a homicidal maniac with a scarred hand who for reasons unspecified they expect to visit the party. It happens that the strange young man who's about to elope with the daughter has a scar on his hand. . . . The deadly climax not only makes no sense in itself, it shatters every hint of sense in what went before, and that is why this short-short is such a faithful mirror of Woolrich's vision of the world.

CHAPTER TEN

The occasional long novelettes like "Graves for the Living" and "I'm Dangerous Tonight" from 1937 marked the path Woolrich's fiction took in 1938. Although only twenty of his stories were published in magazines that year, six of these were exceptionally long, and five of the six rank among the most powerful tales he ever wrote at less than book length.

The pulp that ran by far the best and the most of Woolrich during 1938 was the same one in which his suspense career began, *Detective Fiction Weekly*. His first story of the year for *DFW*, "Endicott's Girl" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 19, 1938), is the tale that he picked many years later as his personal favorite among the hundreds of pieces of short fiction he'd written. Perhaps it's not quite that stellar but certainly it's one of his strongest Noir Cop thrillers and also carries forward the oscillation motif from "The Night Reveals" and "The Morning After Murder." The protagonist, Captain Endicott, a widower raising an eighteen-year-old daughter, slowly and by fits and starts but inexorably becomes convinced on circumstantial evidence like a missing heel and a chocolate-scented handkerchief that his Jenny is the murderer he's currently hunting. This prototypical Woolrich cop, loved by his men for his compassionate heart, not only destroys the clues that seem to link Jenny to the crime but also stalls the investigation by taking steps to jail a woman innocently involved in the case and eventually sets out to murder a man he believes to be a blackmailer endangering his child. In fact Jenny is totally innocent and all the evidence suggesting her guilt turns out to be a farrago of Woolrich Coincidence. At the ostensibly joyous fadeout, Endicott's loyal subordinates cover up the psychotic malfeasance of their revered leader who was ready to execute his daughter himself rather than see her reputation (and his?) sullied. Why this story has never appeared in a Woolrich collection is as big a mystery as there is in its plot.

"I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 12, 1938) is one of the strongest and strangest tales Woolrich ever wrote, and stands with "Three O'Clock" and "Guillotine" as central to our understanding of his world, combining a powerful picture of scratching for survival in the Depression with an almost metaphysical sense of what it means to be a human being, at the mercy of what from one perspective is dumb chance and from another a malevolent god. On a stifling hot night in a poor tenement district of New York, we enter the quietly wretched lives of Tom and Ann Quinn. Working for a miserable salary, dreading being laid off day after day, Tom momentarily loses control on this August night and throws a nearly new pair of his shoes out the open bedroom window at a pair of cats yowling on the back fence. Ann shames her husband into going out into the courtyard in his robe and with a flashlight to hunt for the shoes, but he comes back empty-handed fifteen minutes later, saying that they must have flown into one of the open rear windows of the tenement building across the court. The next morning Ann finds the shoes on her doorstep, neatly wrapped in newspaper, and before long the incident is entirely forgotten. Woolrich then crosscuts to a police investigation, and we learn that those shoes of Quinn's left a print at the scene of a murder on that August night, the strangulation killing of an old miser in a waterfront shack not too many blocks from the Quinn apartment. Flash forward. Tom Quinn comes home from work and tells Ann that he found on the street a wallet containing more than two thousand dollars. They agree to keep the money intact for a few days and check all the papers to see if anyone advertises for it in the lost-and-found columns. Nothing appears in the papers. Then, just after they've begun to spend a little of the money on things they desperately need, the police break into their tenement and arrest Tom for the miser's murder. By this time, which is perhaps a week after the crime, neither Tom nor Ann can remember the shoes-and-cats incident—a plot device at which we'd howl in disbelief if any other writer dared to use it but which here leaves us shuddering at the nature of the Woolrich world. On the evidence of the cash and the shoeprint, Quinn is convicted and sentenced to die. Then on Christmas Eve, a few days before the scheduled execution, a haunted and lonely young plainclothesman named Bob White has a chance encounter at the dead miser's shack and becomes obsessed with the certainty that the wrong man is about to be electrocuted. He questions Ann Quinn again, and this time at long last she remembers the incident of the shoes and the cats. On Christmas night White tracks down a man who on the date of the murder had been living in one of the flats across the courtyard from the Quinns, a nice young guy who's about to propose to a nice young girl and who insists that he too just like Tom Quinn had moved virtually overnight from penury to modest comfort thanks to a whim of chance. The story ends with Tom Quinn released, although his marriage is destroyed, and with the nice young guy who is his spiritual brother facing execution. There is no way in the world either of these Everyman characters can be guilty, but logically one of them must be, and de facto both of them are left in ruins. Life is a trap, malevolent and beyond reason. To each of us unlucky enough to be born, Woolrich says: "I wouldn't be in your shoes, buddy," knowing that he's in them too.

Every so often Woolrich turned out a story in which terrible things happen not to decent people but to someone who deserves whatever he or she gets. When Woolrich gets inside the skin of such a worm, and makes us shake and sweat with him, as in "Dilemma of the Dead Lady"/"Wardrobe Trunk," the result is a classic of terror; but when he stays outside, cool, objective and cynical, as in "The Cape Triangular" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, April 16, 1938), he produces only a clumsy and uninvolving "wages of sin" story. This long novelette is set in a milieu of wealthy stamp collectors where, to put it mildly, the author is not at home. Affluent philatelist Murray Hobart is called in by the police for expert advice as to the stamp collection of Aaron Harding, who has just been murdered. Hobart discovers a priceless Cape of Good Hope triangle stamp in Harding's album, gives in to the temptation to steal it—and winds up paying for his greed by being charged, like the protagonist in Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* with two murders of which he's completely innocent. Woolrich gets his stamp data all wrong, as usual when he deals with a specialized background, and manipulates the plot so awkwardly that even his staunchest fans may have to stifle guffaws. By making Hobart a totally unsympathetic character, Woolrich wants us to feel that he richly deserves his fate, which is not at all the normal Woolrich stance toward victims of circumstance. The notion that if you intend to commit a wrongful act you are just as guilty as if you carry it out comes straight from the Catholic catechisms of Woolrich's boyhood, and is reiterated almost thirty years later in one of his last stories, the 1967 "Intent to Kill."

On a much higher level is "Mystery in Room 913" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, June 4, 1938), a stunning blend of countless Woolrich motifs and touches. This lengthy episodic novelette takes place almost entirely in that distinctively Woolrichian setting, a large New York residential hotel, and much of the local color probably comes from the Marseilles where Woolrich and his mother lived for so many years. Over a long stretch of the Depression, three different men check into Room 913 of the Hotel St. Anselm and unaccountably jump out the window into the street during the night. House detective Striker refuses to accept the triple deaths as coincidental suicides and becomes psychotically obsessed with proving they were something else. First he finds a Bowery derelict with no reason to live, sets him up in 913 as bait, and becomes responsible for the man's death. Then he goes months without a job, changing his appearance until without being recognized he can check into 913 himself and force a confrontation with the specter which, Woolrich has already made clear, is nothing but the naked face of death—and of the world's malevolent nature. With its claustrophobic setting and bizarre murder method and warped investigator, with its Depression milieu and vivid action scenes and heart-stopping suspense, and with its abundance of eyeball-popping coincidences, this novelette is one of the indispensable Woolrich classics.

Equally long and powerful is his next *DFW* novelette, "Detective William Brown" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, September 10, 1938), the ultimate Noir Cop tale from the Woolrich canon. The title character is a conscienceless opportunist who joins the police force and rises through the ranks thanks to a combination of brutality and raw courage—as when he blazes away at a felon fleeing through a crowd of schoolchildren and happens to kill his man without hurting any of the kids. But our viewpoint character in the story is Brown's boyhood friend, fellow cop Joe Greeley, a plodding, dedicated and relatively caring man, and the thrust of the plot forms another of Woolrich's oscillations as Greeley slowly, by fits and starts but inexorably comes to be certain that Brown's meteoric career on the force is based on framing innocent people for crimes and then shooting them "while resisting arrest." When Brown dies a hero's death in a shootout with a wanted cop-killer, Greeley decides to cover up for his buddy and keep the image of the police honor-bright, but by then we've already learned all we need to about the nature of the force. "They kicked the chair out from under him again and again, they tortured him by holding glasses of water before his swollen, bleeding lips, then slowly emptying them out on the floor as he strained forward to drink." Such are the men who are licensed to kill us at their whim, and even those who enter this life as decent people are corrupted by the system they serve. As we'll see when we reach the last years of his life and the 1965 story "The Clean Fight," Woolrich's image of the police and his power to embody that image in chilling Noir Cop stories survived intact till the end.

Three weeks later *DFW* published the quintessential Woolrich story, a tale so intense and packed with anguish and despair one can hardly read it without dying a little. For Woolrich the deepest of all the terrors that came with being alive was the terror of knowing that someday you must die, and the most unbearable form of this terror was to know in advance both the exact moment and the exact horrible nature of your death. That was the situation of John Bridges in 1937's "Speak to Me of Death" and it is precisely the situation of Paul Stapp in "Three O'Clock" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, October 1, 1938). The nondescript proprietor of a small clock and watch repair shop, Stapp has suffered an unexplained concussion—falling beams again?—which has warped his perceptions and convinced him that his wife Fran has been enjoying afternoon trysts in their home with another man. Rather than confront her, he determines to blow into debris both her and her suspected lover and the Stapps' cheap little isolated suburban house and all its contents. Bit by bit, night after night, he smuggles home the raw materials for a time bomb and puts them together in his basement. Then one afternoon at an hour when he knows Fran will be out shopping, he comes home, descends to the basement and sets the bomb to go off at three. As luck would have it, this is precisely the same afternoon two moronic daylight burglars have picked to break into Stapp's house. When he runs into them on his way out, they knock him unconscious, take him down to the basement, bind and gag him and attach him with clothesline to a thick pipe and make their getaway, unaware that they've immobilized him within a few feet of a bomb set to explode in about ninety minutes. The rest of the story forces us to lie there for those ninety minutes with Stapp, unable to speak or move or make a sound anyone can hear, his frozen eyes fixed on the clock as it goes *tick-tick tick-tick* and its hands plunge inevitably toward three o'clock. Until the beginning of his agony Woolrich has gone out of his way to make us dislike this man. But for the last ninety minutes of his life Woolrich compels us to live in his crawling skin, descend into gibbering idiocy with him, recognize him as the carrier of our common fate. It is not by chance that, very late in the story, Woolrich refers to the clear spot on the basement window that "remained to mock him in his crucifixion," nor that three o'clock has traditionally been accepted as the moment Jesus died on the cross. Giving literally unforgettable form to Woolrich's own shudders before the specter of Anahuac, bursting with existential suspense as we live in the flesh of this helpless Everyman frantically struggling to save himself from the inevitable, this may well be the single most powerful story Woolrich wrote in his life.

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The short-lived *Double Detective* also ran six Woolrich tales in 1938 but these are much shorter than his *DFW* work and only the first and last are of serious interest. "You Take Ballistics" (*Double Detective*, January 1938) seems on the surface to be a simple Bizarre Murder Method exercise, in which the Smart Cop, Harvey, outwits a killer who fooled the ballistics technicians by committing murder with a .32 bullet in a .38 pistol. On this superficial level the story is routine rabbit-out-of-the-hat stuff, based on a gimmick which I'm convinced Woolrich made up out of whole cloth even though firearms expert Don B. Kates assures me it would probably work in the real world. Beneath the plot surface, however, lies a stunning evocation of banal business-as-usual brutality as the police "interrogate" the man they believe to be guilty. In a coldly cynical style and with the cop in charge of the case as the viewpoint character, Woolrich describes a procedure that ranges from simple shadowing to psychological pressure to savage beatings and sleep deprivation, culminating in a demand that the suspect sign a statement that no one laid a finger on him. And even though this particular suspect happens to be guilty, Woolrich leaves us with the overwhelming sense that the true evil is in the system that flays him. A Noir Cop classic.

"Never Kick a Dick" (*Double Detective*, February 1938), published a month later, combines Noir Cop elements with a ridiculous story line and the old reliable ending from Cain's *Postman.* In Miami during the tourist season, gambler "Tricks" Bernstein and his shills bankrupt young college student Ed Haney in a rigged game. After being forced to forge his wealthy brother's name on a check securing the debt, the boy blows his brains out. But his brother happens to be Big Boy Barnes, New York tough guy, who comes down to Miami undercover and puts together a ludicrous scheme to insert a bullet into one of Bernstein's handmade cigars so that when he smokes it he'll shoot himself in the mouth. Has there ever been a Bizarre Murder Method better calculated to delight homosexuality symbol hunters? The scheme (pardon the pun) backfires and the loaded cigar winds up killing Barnes himself, but fate, with some blatant offstage help from our author, rigs the circumstances to suggest that Big Boy was deliberately murdered by Tricks, and the ruthless detective Driscoll completes the frame fate started so that Tricks will surely be executed for the accident. Woolrich recycled this climax four years later in his Noir Cop classic "Three Kills for One."

The magazine made it three Woolrich months in a row with "Hot

Towel" (*Double Detective,* March 1938), a very short fable about a little Italian immigrant barber named Tony with a bad case of trembling hands and a Dillinger type who comes to Tony's decrepit Brooklyn basement shop for a haircut. There's no real suspense in this one or even a story line, but it's a vividly written and gently humorous tale, suggestive of some of the "little guy" comedies of Frank Capra.

When Woolrich was in need of a quick buck but temporarily out of decent ideas, he tended to crank out a mechanical exercise in which a bright cop takes one look at what seems to be a suicide or accidental death and pronounces that it was murder. Of all his stories in this vein, the dumbest by far is "The Woman's Touch" (*Double Detective,* August 1938). Celeste, phony French maid in the household of wealthy Mrs. Rhodes, joins with Spike, her burglar boyfriend, in a plot to clean out the jewels from her employer's wall safe. During the holdup two things go haywire: first Mrs. Rhodes dies of a heart attack when Spike slugs her to get the combination, then the jewels in the safe turn out to be fakes. To cover up the murder, Celeste arranges the old lady's body in the bathroom so it will look as if she had a heart seizure while taking a shower. Then she calls the police. Detective Innis takes one look at the setup and makes the customary announcement that it's a case of murder. How did he know? Celeste forgot to furnish the bathroom with soap or towels! Which shows, he says, that "somebody around here isn't so clean themselves or they'd know more about things like that." Can you believe Woolrich actually got paid for this dreck? Once only, however; it has never been reprinted and mercifully never will be.

"I Hereby Bequeath" (*Double Detective,* October 1938) is another of Woolrich's flakier efforts, neither suspenseful nor *noir* nor credible for a moment. As a way of saying thanks for a winning tip on a horse race, orphaned and impoverished busboy Tommy Carr makes out a will leaving all he owns or may ever own to gambler Don Besterman. What Tommy doesn't know is that his only living relative, a miserly Iowa uncle, is on his deathbed and has written a will of his own, leaving to his nephew Tommy the $100,000 he has hoarded in his skinflint lifetime. Besterman and his gang learn about this potential bonanza, insinuate themselves into Tommy's life and by slow stages, feeding him raw whiskey and giving him a freezing bedroom, set out to make him die of pneumonia, but keeping him alive long enough to inherit from his dying uncle so that on Tommy's own death the $100,000 will go to Besterman. Muttonheaded Tommy doesn't catch on till he's at death's door that his newfound buddies are trying to murder him, and potato-witted Besterman leaves a phone at Tommy's bedside throughout the proceedings. Woolrich submitted this story as "Meridian 7–1212." It's readable enough but of a dumbness that boggles the mind.

Woolrich's last appearance in the magazine that year was submitted as "Gratitude" and published as "I.O.U.—One Life" (*Double Detective*, November 1938). I suspect he was aiming this uncharacteristically soft-edged cop story at the major slicks like the *Saturday Evening Post*. Plainclothesman Clinton Sturgess and his seven-year-old daughter Barbara, who means more to him than his own life, are saved from drowning in a freak auto accident by a passing stranger who refuses to give his name and drives off silently into the night. Five years later, as the police dragnet is closing in on fugitive murderer Murray Forman, Sturgess is confronted in the middle of the night by Forman himself, the man who saved the lives of the detective and his child five years before, and who now demands a favor in return, namely a ticket to freedom. This sort of moral dilemma story might have appealed to slick magazine editors except that it depends on the bad guy's having once in his life acted like the Good Samaritan for absolutely no reason—the kind of Woolrich plot flaw which never bothered aficionados of the pulps but was anathema in the technically more meticulous slicks. There are some fine Woolrich touches in this one—for example, the way just before his execution Forman tells Sturgess that whenever he looks into his daughter's eyes he'll see Forman living there—but it's not among his best.

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No other magazine published Woolrich in 1938 more than twice, but the general level of the rest of his fiction for the year was extremely high and at least two tales from the balance of his 1938 output are classics. Both, as it happens, appeared in *Black Mask*. "After-Dinner Story" (*Black Mask*, January 1938) is not only one of his best, combining exceptionally vivid evocation with a powerful sense of *noir*, but also one of his best known, having been reprinted again and again and adapted repeatedly for both radio and television over the years. Late on the afternoon of August 30, 1936, water-filter salesman Stephen MacKenzie boards a street-bound elevator in his high-rise office building. By the time this particular steel cage has descended below the tenth floor it holds seven men: the operator, MacKenzie and five others. Suddenly the beam falls. The cage plummets down the shaft out of control and hits bottom with a crash and is plunged into darkness. The operator is dead and one passenger is moaning with a broken arm. But after emergency workmen have burned a hole in the cage roof with acetylene torches and rescued the trapped people, it's discovered that one of the seven in the car has been shot in the head while the steel box lay in pitch blackness at the foot of the shaft. The police and coroner rule that young Wesley Hardecker, who was a total stranger to all of his companions in the elevator, killed himself in a spasm of panic. Wesley's pregnant wife dies in childbirth soon after the tragedy. More than a year goes by, and out of the blue Hardecker's wealthy father invites all five survivors of the accident to a sumptuous stag dinner in his apartment. After the meal, with the quiet calm of a madman, the father announces that he knows (but can't prove) that Wesley was murdered, knows (but can't prove) which one of his five guests is the murderer—and has just poisoned that man's dinner. Then he sets an antidote on the table, and declares that whoever reaches for it is guilty. Objectively, of course, the one who gulps down the antidote proves himself to be not a murderer but only a yellowbelly. With its demonic avenger figure and its matched pair of Falling Beam situations, this story is a treasure of *noir*, keeping us on tenterhooks until the last word.

The next month's issue of the magazine contained a Woolrich tale of equal stature. "Dime a Dance" (*Black Mask*, February 1938), also known under its reprint title "The Dancing Detective," is made up of strands from a huge number of earlier Woolrich efforts—first person narration from a working woman's perspective as in "Cab, Mister?", the dime-a-dance gal and her murdered female buddy from "Taxi Dance Murder," the psychotic serial killer of women from "Bluebeard's Seventh Wife," the abandoned-house climax from "If I Should Die Before I Wake"—but integrates these and countless other elements into a classic of *noir* suspense, the first of many Woolrich stories in which the female lead is either voluntarily or under compulsion staked out as bait to trap the mad woman-killer. Ginger Allen, one of the ponies at the Joyland dance mill, is taken from work one night by big clumsy homicide cop Nick Ballestier and told that Julie, her only friend among the taxi dancers, has been strangled to death and then stabbed repeatedly by a serial murderer who dances with his victims' corpses (remember "Dead on Her Feet"?) to the jazz tune "Poor Butterfly" (remember how Puccini's opera marked Woolrich for life?). A month goes by, and Nick haunts the dance mill in case the killer makes a return appearance, but nothing happens except that he and Ginger create the delicate tentative beginning of a relationship. Then Nick stops coming, and that's when a strange man—who matches the description of Julie's last partner the night she died—shows up at Joyland and starts to dance with Ginger. The climax is as purely suspenseful as anything in the canon, and Woolrich manages to make the psychotic murderer a human and understandable character when the man tells Ginger what makes him kill women. But what makes "Dime a Dance" stand out even among the *noir* classics is the perfect evocation of a cheap, gaudy, exploitative environment and the desperate young women who are trapped there, clawing out a bare existence in the bleakest of all possible worlds. Mystery writer Q.

Patrick's description of the story says it all: "As you read, you are so completely with the spunky little taxi-dancer heroine that you feel her spine through the cheap evening dress. Your feet ache with hers as she endures those unendurable dime dances in which her partner may at any moment turn out to be the maniac. . . . The suspense and horror of Ginger's last moments in the deserted house with its wheezy old phonograph are almost more than you can endure." It's one of the most often reprinted and highly praised of all the stories Woolrich wrote—and deserves to be.

Of Woolrich's two appearances in *Argosy* that year, the first is a gem unfairly neglected and the second a dud too often revived. "Death in the Yoshiwara" (*Argosy*, January 29, 1938) is a fine action whizbang and the only pulp story he ever wrote set in Japan. The Indiana Jones prototype this time around is Jack Hollinger, a sailor in Tokyo on forty-eight hours' leave, who is drinking sake and suffering from boredom in a dive called The House of Stolen Hours when suddenly the paper-screen entrance whisks open and a beautiful blonde American woman in a blood-smeared evening gown falls into his arms, panting that her fiancé has just been stabbed to death in another of the paper-walled rooms and that the police think she did it. In a stunning action set-piece, Hollinger fights his way out of the building with the woman. Then he finds shelter for her, goes back to investigate the murder, is attacked in the dark by a sumo wrestler, returns to where he left the woman, finds she's been kidnapped and races to the rescue. This is cliffhanger writing at its best, the verbal equivalent of a Republic Pictures serial, but with a climax straight out of *Madame Butterfly*, demonstrating yet again how much Woolrich's life and work were shaped by seeing the Puccini opera in Mexico City as a boy.

In the next week's issue of the same magazine came "Wild Bill Hiccup" (*Argosy*, February 5, 1938), which Woolrich had submitted as "I Bake Your Pardon" and for which he'd received $55. Insofar as it's his one and only Western I suppose it's of some historic interest but there isn't a single Woolrich touch in this barely readable vignette about a badman who shoots up the town whenever his stomach's upset but is gentle as a lamb when his digestion is at peace. Why has such a zero of a story been reprinted several times when dozens of infinitely better Woolrich tales are never revived at all?

On the other hand, both of his contributions to the short-lived *All-American Fiction* during 1938 are well worth our attention fifty years later. "Jane Brown's Body" (*All-American Fiction*, March-April 1938), which he submitted as "The Man Who Married a Corpse," is a seventy-page novelette, told entirely in the present tense, full of action and angst and pulp superhero nonsense and insane spine-freezing readability and quintessential Woolrich motifs and devices. We open with one of the most breathstoppingly vivid scenes in the canon as a man in a roadster races the clock across the moon-washed countryside with a woman who may be alive or dead lying in the back seat. How he found her, or her body, we are never told; what he plans to do with her or it we learn only after we've been chilled to the bone by Woolrich's evocative power. By the time we discover that the man is no less than a Mad Scientist, that he's concocted an Elixir of Life with apparent power to raise the dead, we are too deeply enmeshed in the web to laugh. Two years pass—if this were a movie there would be a montage of leaves falling from a calendar—and a plane slams into the side of a mountain during a night storm. From the wreckage, all but unscathed, climbs yet another of Woolrich's Indiana Jones prototypes, a daredevil soldier of fortune named O'Shaughnessy, who blunders his way into Dr. Denholt's isolated cabin-cum-laboratory, becomes entranced by the beautiful young woman living there who claims not to remember anything that happened more than two years ago, and leaves the place before morning with Nova in his arms and Denholt's curses and dire warnings ringing in his ears. O'Shaughnessy marries Nova and takes her to Chicago where, as Woolrich Coincidence would have it, the first person he negotiates with for a soldier-of-fortune assignment is the one man who knows his bride from her previous life: Tereshko, former lieutenant of the imprisoned crime czar Benedetto. We now learn what neither Nova nor O'Shaughnessy is aware of, namely that she used to be called Jane Brown and used to be Benedetto's girlfriend, and that she killed herself with carbon monoxide while Tereshko was holding her prisoner, trying to make her tell where Benedetto had squirreled away his money. The novelette's middle stretch is pure pulp whizbang stuff as O'Shaughnessy shoots and punches his way through a small army of Tereshko goons and gets himself and Nova out of Chicago. They fetch up in wartorn China, where O'Shaughnessy earns a large chunk of cash flying missions for a generalissimo. When he returns to Shanghai for his bride, the horror elements come back into the story: without injections of Denholt's elixir, Nova is literally rotting away a piece at a time. "A clawlike thing—two of the finger extremities already bare of flesh as far as the second joint; two more with only shriveled, bloodless, rotting remnants of it adhering, only the thumb intact, and that already unhealthy-looking, flabby. A dead hand—the hand of a skeleton—on a still-living body. A body he was dancing with only a few minutes ago." With this echo of the motif from "Dead on Her Feet" and "Dime a Dance" the stage is set for the climax as O'Shaughnessy frantically crosses half the globe with his putrefying bride, desperate to get her back to Denholt's mountain laboratory before all the flesh has fallen off her bones. It's one of the craziest, least credible and yet most heart-wrenching of all Woolrich's Races Against Time and Death. "Life is death," he said near the end of his own life. "Death is in life. To hold your one true love in your arms and to see the skeleton she will become; to know that your love leads to death, that death is all there is, that is what I know and what I do not want to know and what I cannot bear." And also what this haunting story is about.

It's almost impossible to believe that Woolrich's next and last tale for the magazine was "Mamie 'n' Me" (*All-American Fiction*, May-June 1938), a very short and gentle little fable about a compassionate milkman and his beloved horse who, while making their predawn rounds, stumble on a kidnapped baby—and the gangsters who pulled the snatch. There truly was a Frank Capra side to that doom-intoxicated man, and it was never more perfectly embodied than here.

Woolrich's single 1938 story for *Dime Detective* was another dreary rehash of the Smart Cop Calls It Murder gambit. In "Short Order Kill" (*Dime Detective*, May 1938) failing restaurateur Nick Demetrios pays a hit man $750 to kill Joe Markham, his business rival across the street, and make the crime look like an accident. The assassin ambushes Markham on his drive home to the suburbs, and after a quite vivid murder scene he arranges the evidence to suggest that Markham was struck by a hit-and-run driver while changing a flat tire on his own auto. One quick look at the crime scene (which is denied the reader) and State Trooper Crandall spots the Single Little Mistake and cries homicide. The rest is routine, with a garnish of ethnic slurs. Woolrich submitted this one as "You Forgot the Hole."

About six months later he varied the theme yet again, but this version is more memorable and grotesque, centering on one of the most bizarre of all the Bizarre Murder Methods he dreamed up in his thirty-five years writing mysteries. *Clues Detective Magazine* was a medium-grade pulp that had been around since 1926. Street & Smith took it over ten years later and kept it afloat till 1943 with writers like Paul Ernst, George Harmon Coxe, Cleve F. Adams, Richard Sale and Woolrich's occasional drinking buddy Steve Fisher. The sole Woolrich contribution to the magazine was "The Screaming Laugh" (*Clues*, November 1938). In the rural community of Milford Junction, Constable Al Traynor casually looks into the death of skinflint farmer Eleazar Hunt, the apparent cause being a blood vessel that burst after the dour old man laughed too hard. The search for the truth leads Traynor to a horrific struggle at the bottom of a well and to a denouement as macabre as anything in the canon.

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Woolrich's 1938 income was due entirely to magazine sales and amounted to about $4,600, a living wage for the time but down by more than a third from what the pulps had paid him the previous year. Already he was one of the top writers in his field, but he had never enjoyed the grind of the pulpster's life (or anything else for that matter), and the shortfall could only have intensified his desire to escape into a better market. In this respect at least his image of himself as an insect trapped inside a downturned glass proved to be unduly bleak. Within less than two years the glass would lift and he would begin, very slowly and tentatively, to slither away. But not far.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

With the benefit of hindsight we can look at Woolrich's financial and publishing records for 1939 and see clear signals that he was poising himself to break out of the pulps. His income for the year was about $3,800, all from magazines, and his published output was a mere seventeen stories, although most of them were long enough to be billed as novelettes and one might easily have appeared as a novel—and in fact did, in revised form, twenty-one years later. Originally it was the four-part serial "The Eye of Doom" (*Argosy*, January 14–February 4, 1939), a historical adventure owing huge debts to *The Moonstone*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *Gone With the Wind* as well as to the Eye of the Idol theme from Woolrich's own 1936 pulper "Evil Eye." In four episodes ranging over almost two hundred years, we see how a diamond stolen from a Hindu temple curses the lives of people who come to possess it until destiny returns it to its rightful place. Part I, "The Episode of the Vengeful God" (*Argosy*, January 14, 1939), is set in the India of 1757 and tells of Escargot, a wretched conscript in the French colonial army, who stumbles across a gigantic diamond set in the eye of a native idol, steals the stone, kills one of its guardian priests, and seals his own doom and that of several people in future generations.

> "You have taken the eye of a god. This eye shall be fixed upon you, bringing doom. And all who come after you, who shall retain it whether knowingly or not, who shall hold it to them, who shall not return it whence it came—their crime shall be as yours. And this their fate: doom shall be on them remorselessly through all the time of their possession; they shall not escape it though they hide in the depths of the sea or upon the highest mountaintop. Their hopes shall be blasted, their fondest schemes and designs shall crumble to ashes. Only if they eschew possession of what does not belong to them, shall they escape.
>
> "Otherwise their life-blood shall pay for the crime of ownership; they shall die before their time, in whatever clime and epoch is theirs. Yea, the retribution of an Eyeless One shall seek them out, straight as an arrow in flight.
>
> "Go now and meet your Karma, for you have wrought it with your own hand."

Quite a mouthful of curse for a dying priest, but after all Woolrich was being paid by the word. Like the existential fugitives in the *noir* stories, Escargot flees through the nightscape of a strange land, desperately trying to reach a certain Portuguese vessel and smuggle himself aboard before it sails for Europe. Its captain has promised Escargot passage "to as distant a land as one could wish," and even if the doomed one's fate is telegraphed rather unsubtly, this taut suspenseful episode is easily the best of the four.

Part II, "The Episode of the Hungry Knife" (*Argosy*, January 21, 1939), brings us to Paris in 1792, during the French Revolution's reign of terror. Tom Crandall, a gallant young Virginian cast in the mold of every Woolrich *Argosy* hero before him, frantically tries to spirit the lovely aristocrat Philippine de Sancy out of France before she's forced to submit either to the dissolute Jacobin politician Dunot or to the guillotine. Woolrich portrays the French revolutionaries just as contemptuously as he had drawn their modern Latin American counterparts but they're no worse than charming little Philippine, who isn't in love with Crandall but simply using him to get out of the country and into the arms of her nobleman lover. While languishing in the Saint-Lazare prison she makes the mistake of filching a certain gigantic diamond from another jailed aristocrat, so that when Tom rescues her from Dunot's lechery and they make their freedom run for the Austrian border, we know that some quirk of perverse fate will trip them up, as indeed it does at the last possible moment.

Part III, "The Episode of the Voodoo Gun" (*Argosy*, January 28, 1939), moves us to New Orleans in 1871 during Reconstruction, when the Southern upper classes and their tap-dancing black servants were smarting under the carpetbagger yoke. The diamond has crossed the Atlantic with a dying Frenchwoman from whom it's stolen in a New Orleans hospital by Dionyse Bellegarde, a toadish gambler obsessed by fine jewels. Bellegarde offers the huge stone as an engagement ring to lovely but impoverished Amelia Prival, who has the good sense and good luck to turn down both the suitor and the gift. Amelia's true love is Ward Waters, a Rhett Butleresque devotee of Old South punctilio whose name unaccountably switches to Wade Waters in midstream. Furious at Bellegarde's unwelcome proposal to Amelia, Waters publicly insults the gambler and forces him into a sunrise duel on the shore of Lake Pontchartrain, pistols at twenty paces, sure death for one of the two. We are back in the realm of Woolrich's 1937 pulper "Guns, Gentlemen" but with a different form of occult intervention. Although a black voodoo witch has already prophesied that Bellegarde cannot die from a bullet or any other force on earth except a diamond, the yellowbelly gambler tries to rig the duel so that he can't even be wounded, but the curse on the idol's eye causes his scheme literally to blow up in his face.

Part IV, "The Episode of the Golden Cat's-Paw" (*Argosy*, February 4, 1939), moves from London to Australia and then back to India as blonde nightclub singer Maxine Murray, who's inherited the diamond from a distant relative but thinks it's worthless, is pursued and harassed by the evil Maharajah of Maipur and his half-caste hit man Johan Ramm, and saved from each of their dastardly schemes to grab the stone by all-American hero Bud Gordon. This is by far the pulpiest segment of the serial, which climaxes with a tiger hunt and a horseback chase through the jungle. At the fade-out the villainous Ramm is crushed to death in the ruins of the temple where the story opened 182 years before, and the diamond which Maxine and Bud still take to be a worthless trinket winds up back home. As someone said in Part II: "Strange are the ways of fate!" This time Woolrich didn't invoke Satan as he had in 1937's "I'm Dangerous Tonight," but in this comic-strip ambience it's hard to take the fate theme seriously.

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Also bunched at the start of the year were Woolrich's appearances in *Detective Fiction Weekly*, a mere three stories, none of them anywhere near his best but two of the trio full of historical interest. "Silhouette" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, January 7, 1939) begins promisingly as a fresh variant on the oscillation theme. A middle-aged bourgeois couple, waiting one evening on a lonely corner for the last bus home, see—or think they see—a man strangling a woman to death in silhouette on the window shade of the house across the street from the bus stop. Woolrich piles on the vivid details of everyday life and keeps up the did-he-or-didn't-he suspense quite skillfully even though this time there's no emotional tie between the possible witness and the possible killer. But once we go to court for a trial scene capped by a double-surprise aftermath, the plot becomes ridiculous and Woolrich's ignorance of the law is revealed as gargantuan. Would you believe he thinks that a person acquitted of murder can be tried again if new evidence turns up? Ultimately it's a feeble effort, but the tale is an intriguing rough sketch for the later "It Had to Be Murder," better known as "Rear Window."

"The Counterfeit Hat" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 18, 1939) starts out even more effectively with a scene of pure *noir* as young elevator operator Marty Dillon goes off shift, drops into a cafeteria for supper, accidentally leaves with someone else's hat, discovers that the hat's sweatband is lined with counterfeit $20 bills, and, true to the nature of the world of falling beams, winds up paying for this trivial mistake about headgear with his life. The rest of the story combines some unusually plausible detection—by a tough, observant and casually sadistic dick named Cleary—with standard pulp shoot-em-up elements including a gangful of cringing Italian villains. Woolrich submitted this story as "He Talked Though His Hat."

"Those Who Kill" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 4, 1939) is rather dull in its own right but fascinating as the matrix from which Woolrich evolved the 1942 classic *Phantom Lady*. The scene is contemporary Paris and the story line will be familiar to anyone who has read that later novel. American businessman Roger Temple has a fight with his French wife Germaine, storms out of their apartment, picks up a young woman along the Champs Elysées, invites her to dinner and a show, and comes home at the end of the evening to find the police in charge and Germaine strangled to death with one of his neckties. Unable to provide the name of the woman he claims as his alibi or even to find anyone who saw the two of them together during the evening, Temple is convicted of murder and condemned to the guillotine. Awaiting the executioner, he summons his best friend Jack Bridges to come to Paris from New York and *chercher la femme fantôme*. The general outline of the search and its climax are the same in this rough sketch as in the final novel, but the explanation for the phantomness of the lady is completely different, all the French characters talk like New Yorkers, and the *noir* ambience that permeates the novel is almost completely absent from this version.

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In October of 1915, when the eleven-year-old Woolrich was probably still living in Mexico with his father, the Street & Smith publishing firm had launched the first pulp magazine devoted exclusively to crime and detective fiction. It survived in the marketplace for a total of 1,057 issues, until the summer of 1949. During its life it appeared under more than one name but it's best known as *Detective Story Magazine*, the title it assumed early in 1931. Eight years after adopting that name, the magazine's editors began publishing Woolrich, who appeared in three of its 1939 issues with a trio of extremely interesting novelettes. In "The Dog with the Wooden Leg" (*Detective Story*, February 1939) he returns to the motif of the handicapped protagonist which figured so prominently in the 1937 "Humming Bird Comes Home" and (insofar as the immobilized Paul Stapp is the functional equivalent of a paralytic) in the 1938 classic "Three O'Clock." This time however the elderly and blind central character is a man, and for good measure Woolrich provides his viewpoint figure with a German shepherd guide dog who, as the title indicates, suffers from an impairment of his own. Old Marty Campbell, who lives in a cramped New York tenement with his granddaughter Celia and surreptitiously supplements her income by sitting out on a bench in Central Park with the wooden-legged dog Dick and a tin beggar's cup, slowly becomes convinced by a succession of strange sounds around him that a new darkness more dangerous than his blindness has closed in on his and Celia's lives. These early scenes in which Woolrich conveys a growing sense of menace in the noonday sun of the park without once invoking the sense of sight are as terrifying as anything he ever wrote. The Central Park setting suggests that Woolrich intended this story for his New York Landmarks series, and the dog is as real as any of his human beings. It's only when Woolrich has to account for the paranoid twinges that things go haywire: it seems that Dick's wooden leg is being used as a heroin and money depository by dope runners! In the second half of the novelette, Marty and Celia subdue the narcotics cop who suspects them of being involved in the racket, and while Celia keeps the detective a prisoner in the tenement, Marty goes out and tries to clear himself with only the dog to help him. Eventually we wind up with the usual pulp gangster stuff, but the trimmings this time are unusual indeed.

"The Book That Squealed" (*Detective Story*, August 1939) carries forward the line of stories about strong-willed hard-pressed working women and their environments that began with the 1937 "Cab, Mister?" and reached perfection with the 1938 "Dime a Dance." Although it comes within the *noir* universe only marginally, this novelette features some of Woolrich's most plausible detection scenes and one of the most carefully drawn of his small army of female protagonists. Prudence Roberts, a prim and mousy big-city librarian, accidentally discovers that a page has been torn out of a trashy romance novel recently returned by a cardholder. In a powerful evocation of the American social order, the head librarian tears up the card of the poor janitress who reported the defacement and threatens to have her jailed unless she hands over the full price of the book at once. Prudence pays the woman's fine herself and then sets out to learn which of the book's prior readers tore out that page and why. The detection episodes that follow are meticulously wrought and eventually bring Prudence to the conviction that the page was torn out to provide the raw material for a pasted-together kidnap note. When she works up the nerve to visit the local precinct station and present her findings, plainclothesman Murphy ridicules her to her face—and provokes her into trying to prove on her own that someone unknown to the police has been snatched and is being held for ransom. The tale of detection segues into a tale of pure suspense with cliffhanger moments galore. The plot turns out to depend on yet another of the mind-boggling coincidences Woolrich loved not wisely but too well, but the novelette gets high marks for its resourceful and independent heroine, some fine scenes of women interacting and supporting one another, and a few raw glimpses of a system in which to be poor means to be treated like scum.

By all odds the best of Woolrich's three 1939 novelettes for Street & Smith was "You'll Never See Me Again" (*Detective Story*, November 1939), in which for the first time he brings to center stage a motif that was peripheral in the same year's "Those Who Kill": annihilation. You love one person in the world, and suddenly she vanishes without trace as if the city or the earth or the malevolent universe itself had swallowed her. It's a premise that meshes perfectly with the *noir* sensibility at the core of Woolrich's work, and he was to rework and refine it over a number of subsequent stories. Six weeks after his marriage, architect Ed Bliss has his first quarrel with his wife, whose name is Teresa but whom he has nicknamed Smiles. The fight begins over something trivial, a batch of inedible biscuits served for dinner, and escalates into a brawl that ends with Smiles in tears and packing her bag and storming out of the house to go live upstate with her mother and stepfather, vowing that Bliss will never see her again. A couple of days later, when he puts in a long-distance call to her mother in hope of patching things up, Bliss is told that his wife never reached the small town where her mother and stepfather live. And then the real terror begins, as Bliss frantically tries to find out what happened to her, and a homicide dick named Stillman becomes convinced that the reason she has vanished is that Bliss killed her. Woolrich's original title for the novelette was "The Room That Wasn't Restful," and the pointer that leads Bliss to the truth is that the dimensions of a certain room strike him as out of true, somehow *wrong*—a motif that will crop up again three years later in "It Had to Be Murder," better known as "Rear Window." The tension is sustained for more than seventy pages, climaxing in another Race Against Time and Death with a submotif of Burial Alive (although Woolrich hypes up the urgency by having Bliss refuse to let the police do the sensible thing and call ahead to save his wife from a living grave). A few small details are fudged—would you believe that twenty-year-old Smiles was on her own "for several years" before her marriage?—but by and large this is a gem of unease, impossible to set down until the last breathless moment. To what extent Woolrich based the early matrimonial quarreling on his own brief dip into married life we will never know.

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Three more Woolrich novelettes appeared during 1939 in *Dime Detective*, the single gem of the trio being also the only one of the three that has never been reprinted since. Its title is unappetizing, but "The Case of the Killer-Diller" (*Dime Detective*, May 1939) is a first-rate pulper featuring yet another female protagonist scratching out a living in a vividly rendered environment. The milieu is the world of late-1930s swing music and the story opens on a note of genuine *noir* eeriness: in the hour before dawn, after a late-night jam session fueled by gin and (as Woolrich spells it) marihuana in a New York basement, Billie Bligh, vocalist in a freewheeling sextet, wakes up from having fallen asleep across the piano and finds the underground room empty—except for the group's "slush-pump" player, who is hanging from a noose of electrical wire. Lindsey, the homicide dick assigned to the case, follows the footsteps of the sleuths in several mediocre Woolrich tales and sees almost at once that the death is not suicide but murder. He arrests Billie's whining and cringing kid brother, who's a dope addict. When Billie tries to protect the boy by sharing with Lindsey a secret the group has kept to itself, namely that the dead man is the third member of the sextet in two years to have apparently committed suicide by hanging, the singer and cop agree that someone in the group must be a homicidal maniac, and more or less in the manner of "Dime a Dance" set a trap with Billie as live bait. With its vivid musical background and effective suspense and memorable female lead and surprisingly casual treatment of drug use among jazz people, this is one of many Woolrich stories of the thirties whose subsequent oblivion makes no sense at all.

"Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight" (*Dime Detective*, July 1939) boasts one of the perfect Woolrich titles, but for all practical purposes it's the same story as the 1938 "Endicott's Girl," an oscillation exercise in which circumstances pull a senior cop closer and closer to believing that the violent criminal he's hunting is his own child. Detective Captain Luke Keene, charged with tracking down the phantom bandit who's pulled more than a dozen armed robberies, slowly but surely becomes convinced that his estranged son Charlie is his quarry. This version of the tale lacks much of the psychotic edge of "Endicott's Girl"—although there's certainly an element of insanity in the climactic police trap with Keene deliberately letting an innocent store clerk be murdered—but the ultimate explanations are ridiculous.

In "The Case of the Talking Eyes" (*Dime Detective*, September 1939), better known under its edgier reprint title "Eyes That Watch You," the protagonist is a handicapped old woman just as in 1937's "Humming Bird Comes Home," only this lady is not blind but paralyzed and mute. Sixty-year-old Janet Miller lives in a wheelchair in the cozy suburban home of her son Vern and his wife Vera, a couple who resemble Sam Cook and Thelma from the 1936 classic "The Night I Died" in more ways than one. Vera is what we think of today as Film Noir Woman, a monster incarnate, a black widow spider with sex appeal, who conspires with her lover, a garageman named Haggard, to asphyxiate Vern to death with a defective hot-water heater and collect the insurance on his life. Their plans are overheard by Janet, whose loss of other faculties has intensified her sense of hearing, but being unable to move or speak, how can she possibly warn her son that he's about to be murdered? It's a situation made to order for Woolrich's special talents and he exploits it for all it's worth—but only until the midpoint of the story. In the less intense and suspenseful second half, the focus shifts to Casement, the sympathetic young detective who's investigating Vern's death, and his efforts to communicate with the immobilized old woman and find out what message she's so desperately trying to get through to him. Woolrich fumbles his climax badly, and couples that blunder with a surprising lack of the usual vivid detail and a style that lapses all too often into the floridity of silent-movie titles. ("She came, the murderess, in pink satin and foamy lace, like an angel of destruction." "A residue of smoke came through the mesh of the veil, made her look like the monster she was." "'Take a look at this woman, whose son you murdered. Face those eyes if you can—and deny it.'") It's as if he'd lost all control imagining the hideousness of anyone who would separate a young man from his dear old mother! Woolrich recycled the situation of the mute and paralyzed witness in his 1941 novel *The Black Curtain* but bungled it again, and it wasn't until the radio adaptation of the novel, broadcast on *Suspense* in 1943, that the blink-once-for-yes-twice-for-no motif from this earlier novelette was brought to the peak of dramatic intensity.

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In the latter half of 1939, *Black Mask* published a Woolrich story in five out of six issues, including three misfires and two gems. In "Borrowed Crime" (*Black Mask*, July 1939) he recycled the premise of 1937's "The Lie"—out of love for another person the protagonist frames himself for a murder—but flavored it this time with a strong dose of Depression atmosphere. The trapped condition of the very poor permeate every word of the first few scenes as we are introduced to penniless and jobless Jerry Swanson, whose young and seriously ill child will die if he's not moved to Arizona at once. In the pit of despair, Swanson picks up the newspaper, reads of a $1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of whoever murdered a prominent stockbroker, and does for love of his son precisely what the narrator of "The Lie" did for love of his father: he frames himself and then confesses. Thanks to unutterable police stupidity he gets away with the deception, even when he's made to reenact the crime in detail for official movie cameras. As prearranged, the newspaper pays the $1,000 to Swanson's wife. But when she is killed and their child seriously injured on the way to Arizona in a bus accident, and Swanson tries to unframe himself and rejoin the boy, he finds to his horror that he's told his lies too well and no one will believe him—except for Butler, the one detective on the force with a streak of humanity. In the balance of the novelette Butler tries to clear Swanson by tracking down the real murderer. The gimmick he uses—disguising himself as the next person scheduled to be killed—was to resurface a year later at the climax of Woolrich's first suspense novel, *The Bride Wore Black*. Nonsensical detail work makes a shambles out of what might have been a *noir* classic.

The best known of Woolrich's *Black Mask* tales for the year is "Men Must Die" (*Black Mask*, August 1939), usually referred to by its reprint title "Guillotine." As in the same year's "Those Who Kill" and several earlier stories, the setting is supposed to be contemporary France; but it's a uniquely Woolrichian France, where all the locals talk in American slang and the bistros look like big-city U.S. bars and the Metro is indistinguishable from the IRT. The structure of the story is also offtrail for Woolrich, with the continuity broken down into a large number of short scenes. The events of the present, as condemned murderer Robert Lamont is ritually prepared for execution, alternate with chronologically ordered flashbacks so that we see how Lamont came to commit his crime—a routine killing when he was surprised by a fat bourgeois in the course of a burglary—and also why he hopes he won't have to die for it. His partner Babette, who is passionately in love with him, has contrived to meet M. de Paris, the head-slicer, a lonely and inoffensive old man whose pride is his flower garden and his status as the only man in France licensed to kill. Babette dines with the old headsman on the night before he is to perform on Lamont, hoping desperately that she'll be able to slip poison into his meal and thus invoke the national tradition—which apparently Woolrich invented out of whole cloth—that when the executioner dies, the next person to be guillotined receives a pardon. The narration is so objective and detached that we are given not a hint which of these two, the private murderer or the state murderer, we're supposed to wish dead. And by the time the flashback scenes have caught up with the present, and Lamont is brought step by step closer to the scaffold while the old man is journeying across predawn Paris with the guillotine blade in his bag and his own death churning inside him, the suspense in this grotesque classic has become all but unbearable.

Next month came "Crime by the Forelock" (*Black Mask*, September 1939), a cockeyed excuse for a tale of psychological detection whose only real strength is the gruesomeness of its opening scene. As a mortician is combing the hair of a dead nightclub singer, preparing her body for burial, a stubborn curl pops out of her hair and falls to the floor, revealing a bullet hole in her skull. Alcott, the detective assigned to the case, soon discovers that the evidence points equally at two suspects: the dead woman's worthless ex-husband, and a wealthy clubman she'd been blackmailing over an alleged illegitimate child who in fact is no child at all but a canary! To break what amounts to a mathematical tie, Alcott rigs a psychological trap in the funeral parlor, using as bait the pop-out curl right in the middle of the dead woman's forehead. It's a routinely readable exercise but not plausible even for a second.

Woolrich was back again in the next issue, not only with a story but with an open letter to the reader in which he describes how his stories were written. It's a classic snapshot of a pulpster at work and is well worth quoting at length.

> To whom it may concern (and if you paid your fifteen cents for the mag you are now reading it concerns you):
>
> The story "Collared" . . . was first a half dozen words on a little tab of paper, "Rouge marks on collar trap killer." It kicked around in a pigeonhole with a flock of other little tabs for anywhere from six months to two years.
>
> Then one night it got pulled out, and brought on a period of deep thought for about fifteen minutes, which to anyone who happened to see it would have strongly resembled dopiness (and maybe was, for all deponent knoweth).
>
> Then over a period of about a week it, the aforementioned tab, grew into a sheaf of hotel stationery ("No envelopes, please, just the inserts"), all scrawled over with pencil, usually diagonally from the lower left hand corner to the upper right.
>
> Then over a period of another week, it turned into about thirty pages typed, double spaced. Then over a period of about forty-eight hours (Am I being too sanguine, Ed?) it turned into a check. Then it turned into spaghetti, shoes, cigarettes and things like that. Where is it now? That's the story of a story.

> Once I read one of my yarns after it had been printed in a magazine, and I thought it was terrible. I asked the editor if he thought it was terrible, and he said: "No, it wasn't terrible." So maybe it was because I knew what was coming next.
>
> P.S. I hope you don't think so about this one, or no more spaghetti, shoes, and cigarettes for me.
>
> Cornell Woolrich

Black Mask editor Fanny Ellsworth, the "Ed" to whom that last parenthesis was addressed, printed an afterword to this letter that deserves some sort of prize for getting more about Woolrich wrong in fewer words than anyone else has succeeded in doing. She calls him "one of the most modest and self-effacing men in the world," claims that it was his *first* novel that won a $10,000 prize, and insists that of all his innumerable pulpers "nary a one [is] hackneyed, potboiler work." She does however praise him "for his ability to create powerful suspense and for his talent for originality of plots."

What kind of story would justify such a buildup? "Collared" (*Black Mask*, October 1939) certainly has an original plot, but it's so clumsily rigged that one could easily believe Woolrich wrote it under the influence of a controlled substance. The protagonist and first-person narrator is Mae, a once honest gal who's become a floozy and the mistress of mobster Buck Colby. When she learns that Colby has murdered his other girlfriend and is planning to frame the crime on the dead woman's straight-arrow boyfriend, Mae embarks on a desperate project: to unframe the innocent man, pin the murder on Colby and do it in such a way that Buck will never know who betrayed him. The situation is made to order for suspense, but the cheap tinny tone muffles most if not all our sympathy for Mae, and the clunking of Woolrich's clodhoppers behind the scenes as he rigs all sorts of ridiculous contrivances to keep her alive and well for the climax is as loud as thunder.

The year closed with "Through a Dead Man's Eye" (*Black Mask*, December 1939), in which Woolrich reworked some of the elements from his 1937 thriller "If I Should Die Before I Wake" into a suspenser just as vivid and chilling but more naturalistic and circumstantial, without the fairy-tale overtones of the earlier version. The narrator is twelve-year-old Frankie Case, the adventurous and plucky son of a homicide dick who due to an economy squeeze is about to be demoted and put back in uniform. Swapping one found object for another as boys will, Frankie winds up the proud if puzzled owner of an undamaged glass eye—and slowly comes to suspect that the person whose face the eye came from has been secretly murdered. Eager to help his dad stay on the homicide squad, Frankie starts playing after-school detective, tracing the eye back to the cuff of a suit left at a cleaner's shop and from there to a sinister man who takes long walks deep into the forest. The climax is an orgy of breathless terror.

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By the end of the 1930s the Popular Publications firm which had been organized at the start of the decade had grown into a giant, and a dazzlingly fertile one, giving birth to new pulp magazines with the speed of a mother rabbit. In October of 1937 its owners launched *Strange Detective Mysteries*, touting the new monthly as a treasure house of tales that were "bizarre, mysterious, thrill-packed, different . . . strange, extraordinary." The *Roget's Thesaurus* promotional style didn't help, and after two issues the magazine was retitled *Captain Satan*. But the original title and concept surfaced again a year later, in November 1938, and the revived *SDM* lasted for another twenty-six issues, until May of 1943, although in bimonthly form. Woolrich's only appearance in the magazine was submitted as "The Phantom Leopard" and published as "The Street of Jungle Death" (*Strange Detective Mysteries*, July-August 1939). It's a novelette of purest pulp compounded, for which he was paid $210, about a penny a word. The setting is Hollywood and the plot is precipitated when a spotted leopard, which actress June Gale is walking around on a leash as a publicity stunt, breaks away from her and vanishes somewhere on a one-block-long street. A few nights later, the reign of terror begins. A Mexican girl is clawed to death in a tunnel as she's returning to her home in the barrio with her father's supper. Then an eighteen-year-old Hollywood hopeful is torn apart in an enclosed cemetery. Then June Gale's younger sister is caught and mangled in a lonely park in the dead of night. Dunbar of the homicide squad tries in vain to convince his superiors that these deaths are the work not of a leopard but of a human hiding behind the animal's claws. To prove his case he sets up a ridiculous trap, with June herself as the bait. The ultimate explanations are laughable, but Woolrich generates tremendous tension in the sequences where the various women are stalked or think they are being stalked in the night. Three years later he expanded the novelette, junked most of its pulpy aspects, moved the setting to Latin America, and changed the title to *Black Alibi*.

Horror Stories was another Popular Publications magazine of the weird-menace type. Under editorial director Rogers Terrill it made its debut in January 1935 and appeared every other month, in alternation with the similar Popular pulp *Terror Tales*, until April of 1941. Its editors bought one story from Woolrich, one of the worst he ever perpetrated. "Vampire's Honeymoon" (*Horror Stories*, August-September 1939) fits more or less within the line of Woolrich tales in which the unspeakable enters the lives of everyday men and women. New York civil engineer Dick Manning steps out on a terrace balcony during the party celebrating his engagement to the blonde and golden-fleshed Sherry Wayne and discovers in the deep shadows a woman who is his fiancée's exact opposite, an apparition with raven-black hair and dead-white skin, who calls herself Faustine. It doesn't take a psychoanalyst to recognize the situation as based on the breakup of Woolrich's parents' marriage and his civil engineer father's liaison with one or more Mexican women. Instantly Manning is under the Night Lady's spell and they leave the party together and get married. On their Atlantic City honeymoon, Faustine has all the mirrors taken out of their hotel suite and refuses to go outdoors in the daylight hours. As if that weren't enough to take the sexual excitement out of the wedding trip, each morning when he wakes up Manning finds strange bite marks on his neck as if he'd been stung during the night by giant mosquitoes. (Woolrich's original title for this story was "Blood Kisses.") It takes the poor goop forever to figure out what we have known since the title: that he's married a vampire! In the silent movies of the teens, a woman who broke up a marriage was often referred to as a vampire, or vamp for short. The tale ends as all vampire sagas must, with the cross, the prayer and the stake through the heart. Thus was Woolrich revenged on his father's native mistress(es). For this impossible hunk of pulp, he was paid $135, which was at least $100 too much.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Most people who know something about Woolrich believe that he spent the years between 1934 and the end of the decade writing only crime and suspense fiction for the pulps. This perception is understandable since from his magazine work of those years only the crime and suspense fiction has ever been reprinted. But besides the dozens of stories and novelettes discussed in the last five chapters of this book, he managed in the first six years of his mystery-writing life to whack out fourteen short romances and a sentimental serial. When I began tracking down these elusive tales I expected to have to grit my teeth and plow through a pile of Woolrich at his unspeakable worst. Surprise! Although his romances are not in the same league or even the same world with his *noir* classics, several of them have turned out to be intimately connected with his suspense fiction and therefore to have a fascination all their own.

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Breezy Stories, in which all fourteen of Woolrich's short love stories of the period were published, had been launched by the C.H. Young company in 1915 as competition for another magazine known as *Snappy Stories*, offering what pulp historian Robert Sampson describes as "mildly risqué fiction about girls who might yield a kiss, or at least think about it . . . and who disregarded moral limits by wearing bathing costumes exposing their ankles." *Breezy* was still a going concern in 1933 when the publisher merged it with the venerable *Young's Magazine*, which had been founded in 1897. During the Depression *Breezy* was paying a penny a word for fiction that, according to Sampson, "was rich in compromising situations, casual acceptance of male (if not female) infidelity, and a light-hearted approach to social conduct. Suggestive teasing filled the stories. In spite of all, the heroine remained pure, if barely, and true love resolved all problems, close as the heroine sometimes came to love of the other kind." The magazine's circulation was damaged by a New York City crackdown on so-called suggestive fiction in the late thirties and it went belly-up in 1941.

Most of the fourteen tales Woolrich sold to *Breezy* editor Phil Painter don't fit comfortably within Sampson's description. Some of them are idiotic love stories with sitcom plot lines but the most interesting are those with links to his past or future suspensers.

His debut in the magazine, "Spanish—And What Eyes!" (*Breezy Stories*, April 1935), falls squarely into the first category. Our hero, Quincemouth University undergrad Roderick Bingham, is fixated exclusively on foreign girls but will inherit his aunt's $2,000,000 estate only if he's married—and not to a foreigner—by his twenty-first birthday. Obviously it would behoove him to pay an American girl to marry him for a few days and then get a divorce, but this ploy never enters what he uses for a mind. A gold-digger known as Ukulele Lulu finds out about the situation and persuades her naive friend Dolly Murphy to dress up in a Spanish Dancer costume, visit the Quincemouth campus and hook Roddy before he turns twenty-one, in the expectation that she'll divorce him right after his birthday, demand half the $2,000,000 bequest as alimony and split the take with Lulu. With a fine confidence in her ability to seduce Roddy in a few hours, Dolly alias Dolores waits till the day before his twenty-first birthday to invade the Quincemouth frat house. Then comes what Woolrich fondly imagines to be an uproarious comedy scene, crammed with bumps, grinds, pratfalls and fractured Spanish phrases. Shortly after midnight—in other words beyond the marriage deadline in his aunt's will—Roddy confesses to "Dolores" first that he knew all along she wasn't Spanish and second that he wants to marry her anyway so they can live happily ever after on the $2,000,000 which in fact he's too late for. Dolly falls genuinely in love with him on the spot, wires Lulu that their deal is off and admits to Roddy that she was born in Windsor, Ontario, which is nice in terms of his fixation but also means that even if they were married on time he'd still lose out on the bequest! At least the story is historically significant as the first in a long line of tales where Woolrich mangled legal premises.

Somewhat more sensible but still in the sitcom mode is "Don't Fool Me!" (*Breezy Stories*, June 1935). Sophisticated June Bannon takes under her wing a prim gal named Helen Hyde whom she meets at a party. Helen looks like a mouse with spectacles and lacks the simplest social graces but constantly raves about a young man named Marvin Carteret whom no one ever sees but who she claims adores her. Convinced that Helen has made up an imaginary boyfriend to assuage her loneliness, June first invites the prim lass to share her apartment and then sets out to throw Helen into the arms of Tommy Moore, an unattached young man of her acquaintance. Love indeed blooms between Helen and Tommy after what may have been a night of premarital sex—Woolrich's notion of girl talk is so coy we can't tell for sure—but the punchline comes right after the couple go off to find a justice of the peace. June's doorbell rings and there on her threshold stands "the best-looking thing she had seen since her last Gable picture," asking for Helen and introducing himself as Marvin Carteret! Woolrich ends the story on this note of irresolution.

In "Clip-Joint" (*Breezy Stories*, August 1935) a bit of underworld spice in the boy-meets-girl recipe leads to one of Woolrich's better thirties romances. Skip Rogers decks himself out in a dark blue chesterfield, white scarf and slanted derby for a night on the town and is steered by a voracious cabbie to an "intimate private club" on Manhattan's 72nd Street—a club whose management spikes patrons' highballs, charges $100 per drink and keeps customers locked up until their checks clear. (A similar establishment figures in Woolrich's 1936 pulper "Crime on St. Catherine Street.") Trapped in the club, Skip reveals to the hostess assigned to soften him up that he's the son of the millionaire owner of the Robbins & Rogers chain of automats, and offers her diamonds, orchids, a mink coat, a penthouse and his love if she'll double-cross her associates and help him escape. For purely selfish reasons she changes sides and they get away together. The next day when they meet again in an R&R automat the lady winds up literally with egg on her face when Skip confesses that he's just a busboy who was out on a one-night-spree in borrowed evening clothes. This crudely written but quite cynical story is capped O. Henry–style with the revelation that Skip really is the son of the automat king! The gimmick of the playboy pretending to be a waiter is recycled in the Ladd Mason episode of Woolrich's 1943 novel *The Black Angel*. "Clip-Joint" was reprinted in the Winter 1936 issue of *College Life*, the only time any Woolrich tale from *Breezy* reappeared elsewhere.

"No Kick Coming" (*Breezy Stories*, October 1935) is another romance with crime flavoring, but this one teeters on the brink of *noir*.

Ivy, a waitress at a chain restaurant, is so tired of the perfect predictability of her stodgy boyfriend Walter that one night when Walter is unavoidably detained she goes off by herself to a dance hall and is picked up by Eddinger, a devil-may-care Cagney type with a what-the-hell gleam in his eye. He's also, as it turns out, a gangster. Soon after their meeting he breaks a jewelry store window and steals a ring Ivy admired, and the next day, as Woolrich Coincidence would have it, he tries to hold up the very Dutch Corner where Ivy waits on tables. Not only does she hide him from the cops but she dashes out into the night with him as police bullets fly all around them. "How does it feel to be alive?" he asks her gleefully as they careen through New York's dark streets in an auto chase. They are granted a few hours of stolen love in a country hotel before the cops smash their way in and riddle Eddinger with lead. Having tasted her fill of life and then some, Ivy slips back to the city and a perfectly predictable future with stodgy Walter.

The one story in the *Breezy* cycle which overflows with distinctive Woolrich elements is "Flower in His Buttonhole" (*Breezy Stories*, November 1935) with its insult humor and tinny saxophone music and thirties song lyrics like "Ten Cents a Dance" and, for the first time anywhere in his work, a taxi dancer as protagonist. The opening scene with Faith climbing the stairs to the Broadway dance mill and jousting with the truculent manager on the way in is repeated in Woolrich's 1938 suspense classic "Dime a Dance." On this particular evening both Faith and her pal Trixie are wearing green gowns—Trixie by chance, Faith so that a man whom she's never met but has fallen in love with through phone conversations, and who is coming to the dance hall tonight, will know her when he sees her. The badge by which she is supposed to know him is a white flower in his buttonhole. The band strikes up a tune. "[T]he glass prisms were spinning around in the ceiling, sending down a shower of sparks, and under them in the dim light couples glided silently over the floor like shadows." Faith is chosen as dance partner by a number of men as the night goes on, with the whirling blue and green lights "causing a sort of dreamy twilight to fill the ballroom as though it were a grotto or undersea cavern." The lights also make green dresses appear blue and vice versa. Finally a man *without* a flower in his buttonhole dances with Faith and asks what color gown she's wearing. "Blue," she lies. While they're dancing Trixie comes over and whispers that her own partner of the moment *is* wearing a flower in his buttonhole and therefore must be Faith's blind date. The women exchange partners and Faith babbles sweet romantic nothings to the new man in her arms, whom she believes to be the one she loves. Before long she's agreed to leave the ballroom with him—which for Broadway dance hall hostesses can mean only one thing, although in fact Faith has never done it with a man until now—

while her pal Trixie remains stuck with Faith's original partner. Eventually Trixie and the reader discover that Faith's *real* blind date was the first man, the fellow who had lost his boutonniere and is now with Trixie, and that the second man, the one whom Faith has innocently invited up to her apartment, is a total stranger out for quick sex. The stage is set for a genuine Woolrich clock race as Trixie frantically tries to catch up with Faith and straighten out the comedy of errors before her pal's virtue is sullied. Even without the innumerable ties to Woolrich's suspense fiction this is a surprisingly readable story.

Which is more than can be said for "Annabelle Gets Across" (*Breezy Stories*, December 1935), a simple romantic sitcom of little interest today. Working girl Annabelle Moore impulsively spends half her week's wages on a $14 pair of sandals and then is forced to take a taxi home to her Columbus Avenue tenement when a sudden downpour threatens to turn the shoes into mush. On the floor of the cab she finds a monogrammed wallet containing a business card, the snapshot of a bald and paunchy man, and $2,500 cash. Anticipating what the protagonist of Woolrich's *The Black Path of Fear* was to do nine years later, she visits the elegant home of the wallet's owner in hope of a modest reward for returning his money. When she learns that the man has just left to catch a Europe-bound luxury liner, she races to the dock, blunders her way to the man's cabin, is mistaken by his friends for a process server, gets locked in a closet and winds up far out at sea and in a gentleman's bedroom to boot. The owner of the wallet turns out to be not bald and plump but a Cary Grant clone, and the romance between Annabelle and this paragon—complete with offstage premarital sex!—culminates in comic misadventures as our heroine tries to leave the ship in France without a passport. The European scenes are based of course on Woolrich's trip abroad with his mother.

Only three Woolrich tales appeared in *Breezy* the following year but each of them is closely connected with at least one of his works of crime fiction. "Pick Up the Pieces" (*Breezy Stories*, March 1936) begins as a certain Mr. Smith checks into a New York hotel room and tells the assistant manager that he'll soon be joined by his wife. Once settled, he phones an agency and sends for a young woman who's a total stranger to him. She knocks on the door, they have a casual conversation and the woman nonchalantly undresses and prepares herself for bed. They don't have sex but sit around sedately awaiting company: a private detective, Mr. Smith's real wife, and her new boyfriend. What is imminent is the sort of phony raid on a love nest that was customary back when the only ground for divorce under New York law was adultery, and Mr. Smith's visitor makes her living being photographed in deceptively compromising positions with men. ("I don't have to put up with half the familiarity a taxi-dancer does," she tells him.) The raid takes place on schedule but events get out of hand when the professional corespondent realizes that her client is still in love with his wife and pulls a Machiavellian stunt to bring them together again. More than thirty years later Woolrich recycled the same situation, with murder added, in his 1967 story "Divorce—New York Style."

Well written, cynical and ironic are the words for one of Woolrich's finest thirties romances, "The Clock at the Astor" (*Breezy Stories*, April 1936). Scene One takes place on a rainy night in April of 1929. A nameless woman walks New York's dark and glistening streets, headed for the Astor Hotel in whose lobby she's to meet the man who will travel with her by bus to her distant hometown and marry her there. This motif will crop up again in Woolrich's 1944 novel *Deadline at Dawn*. The Astor lobby is "New York's favorite meeting place," where dozens of people are waiting for their dates just as in a very similar scene in 1948's *Rendezvous in Black*. Woolrich poignantly describes the imposing lobby clock in whose moving hands a million couples have tried to read their fate—"Is he through? . . . Doesn't she care anymore?"—and the two gilt cupids hovering above the clock face, "heartless under their gold-leaf." The minutes tick away and tick away, and panic begins to lap at the woman. The man never appears. She has no money and knows no one in the city and the man she loved and counted on has vanished as in a Woolrich annihilation thriller. She is picked up in the lobby by a well-dressed elderly man who invites her to dinner. Scene Two takes place on a rainy night exactly seven years later. The woman returns to the Astor and, as chance would have it, the man who never came in 1929 is waiting in the lobby. To tell more might ruin a story that well deserves revival.

"His Name Was Jack" (*Breezy Stories*, July 1936) deals with a young woman named Sharlee, no relation to the Sharlee of Woolrich's 1930 romance "Gay Music." This one has been married for a year to Craig Milburn, who is not only a drunk but brags of his affairs with other women. Her worldly-wise friend Stella Hart advises her to make Craig jealous by faking evidence around the apartment so that he'll think she's been entertaining a lover, a mythical Lothario whom they christen Jack. They set the stage with a whiskey bottle, a cigar obligingly smoked for them by the hallman and other props, but Craig sees through the ploy in two seconds flat and a furious Sharlee dashes out into the night, bent on throwing herself at the first man she meets. After comic mishaps like being mistaken for a prostitute by both a real hooker and a drunken sailor, Sharlee is rescued from the mean streets by a passing stranger who brings her to his posh apartment and plies her with vintage port. The wine puts her to sleep before anything naughty can happen. In the morning she discovers she's falling in love again but she doesn't yet know the name of the new man in her life—

which of course turns out to be Jack. "Doesn't life play the craziest tricks on us sometimes?" Bits of this story crop up, as we'll see, in the manuscript of the novel known as *Into the Night*, which Woolrich was working on at the time of his death.

Of his last five tales for *Breezy*, three have failed to surface after extensive search: "Jimmy Had a Nickel" (*Breezy Stories*, January 1937), "The Girl Next Door" (*Breezy Stories*, July 1937) and "The Invincibles" (*Breezy Stories*, January 1939). Not much has been lost if they're at all like "Kidnapped!" (*Breezy Stories*, May 1937), a sitcom with whizbang sauce. Spoiled heiress Edwina Maitland plots to con $25,000 out of her tightwad father by pretending she's being held for ransom by gangsters. She advertises in the personals column of the *New York Star* for someone to kidnap her and winds up hiring Dance Hall Danny Connolly, a genial Cagney type who agrees to recruit some pals and do the job for half the $50,000 ransom. That Saturday evening Edwina strolls alone into Central Park, where another spoiled heiress was kidnapped in Woolrich's 1936 "Murder in the Middle of New York," and is snatched as per the plan, only not by Danny's buddies but by some *real* gangsters who have stumbled upon the scheme. The rest of the story tracks "Murder in the Middle of New York" in the sense of describing the frantic efforts of a guy named Danny to save the kidnap victim, but this time the action is played for laughs in the Damon Runyon manner and there's not a single credible moment as our hero and his sidekick Pinkie miraculously trace the gangsters' car clear across New York to their hideout. The traditional last-minute rescue is followed by the traditional romance, and whatever objections Edwina's father might have had to a Cagney-esque son-in-law are stifled by the revelation that Dance Hall Danny is an undercover G-man!

The opening of "I Knew Her When—" (*Breezy Stories*, October 1937) may evoke in aficionados of Woolrich's suspense tales a strong sense of déjà vu. Jerry Delaney, a young subway guard on the IRT line, gets up early one morning, leaves for work, walks to the station at 125th and Broadway, lifts a chain that bars his way, catches a train uptown to the end of the line at 242nd Street, boards the next inbound express and travels in it down to Fulton Street and Wall Street and under the East River to Brooklyn. It's exactly the way Woolrich began his 1936 action classic "You Pays Your Nickel," better known as "Subway." This Delaney, however, encounters not a mad gunman but a suitcase-laden young woman, obviously new to the city, who gets her dress caught in the car door while trying to exit the train. Jerry gives her his home address and a note asking his wife to mend the garment and even lends the woman his uniform jacket so she can reach the Delaney tenement without embarrassment. When he comes home from work that evening the woman is still there, chatting away as if she's known his wife for years. "I want to be a big star," Peggy Parker tells the Delaneys. "I was born unknown, but I'm not going to die that way, and that's about all anyone can do for themselves in this life." She ends up spending the night on a cot in the Delaney's flat. By this point Jerry is in love with her, not sexually but as a Woolrich man loves, the way a guy might fall in love "with a star over his head in the night sky." Years later, when Peggy has indeed become Broadway's brightest star, Delaney is warmed by the memory that he knew her when. . . . A strangely moving story.

• • •

Near the end of his fourteen-tale cycle for *Breezy*, Woolrich tried his hand at a lengthy serial in somewhat the same vein and sold it to *Sweetheart Stories*, a love pulp in the Dell chain of magazines. The periodical had been launched in 1925, around the time Woolrich found a publisher for his first novel, and was to survive into the early forties. "We want modern love stories," wrote editor Helen MacVichie, "with situations in which any vital, romantic girl of today might find herself, either innocently or through recklessness." Also necessary, she said, was "strong, emotional conflict between hero and heroine." At the time Woolrich offered her a four-part serial along these lines, the magazine was paying between a penny and a penny and a half per word.

"Deserted!" (*Sweetheart Stories*, August–November 1938) is historically important as Woolrich's first piece of fiction during his crime-writing period that approached the length of a novel, and to the student of his earlier work it's a fascinating mix of conventional romance ingredients with customary Woolrich plot flubs—and with material lifted bodily from two of his previous pulp suspense tales. The writing unfortunately is routine, with *noir* word magic virtually nonexistent, and the people are cardboard.

The principal characters are Katie, the devout and naive checkroom girl at gangster Beefy Avalon's Joyland dance palace, and Dance Hall Danny McGovern, who combines Cagney dialogue and mannerisms with a face so handsome that women swoon at the sight of him. The couple's marriage plans seem doomed when Danny is fired from his job, but suddenly Beefy offers the boy a lucrative position collecting overdue bills from well-heeled patrons of his liquor business. The lovers are joined in holy wedlock at the Little Church of St. Anthony in the presence of Danny's indomitable mother Mollie McGovern, a dead ringer for Dewey Haines's mother in the 1927 *Children of the Ritz*.

Flash forward several weeks. After finding "a menacing automatic" in Danny's dresser drawer and several crime stories cut out of their daily newspaper, Katie has finally caught on that their newly acquired possessions are being paid for with dirty money. Then she learns that Danny is being "vamped" by Jean Tierney, a dancer at another Beefy Avalon establishment known as the Curfew Club. (A club of the same name was the scene of 1936's "The Mystery of the Blue Spot.") Danny comes home from a mysterious errand, reassures Katie that she's the only woman in his life, and is summoned by Beefy for one more mysterious errand.

Which, we discover in Part Two, involves collecting a liquor debt from Mr. Ellerton, a moneyed lush. Danny crashes a party at the rich deadbeat's Park Avenue duplex and instantly captivates the heart of Ellerton's lovely and spoiled daughter Josephine, who has never met a real gangster before. She helps him collect for Beefy but demands in return the right to cling to him like a leech. When he goes to the Curfew Club to report to Beefy with Josephine glued to his arm, a light bulb snaps on in the gangster's brain and, exactly like the sinister nightclub baron in 1936's "Murder in the Middle of New York," he sets in motion a plot to kidnap the heiress and hold her for ransom at Danny's apartment. For the next several scenes Woolrich invents almost nothing but simply copies from that two-year-old pulper. Finally, on Danny's orders, Katie slips past the gang members guarding Josephine in their flat (one of the gunmen is called Angel Face) and goes underground until the coast is clear. Her escape furnishes the most suspenseful sequence in the serial. Katie takes refuge in a squalid room in the East Sixties and reads the papers voraciously, waiting for Danny's signal that it's safe to rejoin him. Josephine Ellerton is ransomed and returned to her parents and the entire family leaves at once for Europe. Finally, at a surreptitious rendezvous in the waiting room of the 125th Street railroad station, Danny meets her again, tells her that all's well and takes her to their new home, a luxury apartment on the West Side. Katie not only refuses to move in but demands that he break with Beefy and the gang. "I know too much," he protests. "If I try to give them up, they'll kill me like a dog." The prospect seems not to bother Katie unduly. "I'm just a girl, and all I have is three things: you, Danny—and my honor and my belief in God. I don't want to give up the last two. . . . This is goodbye." Are we supposed to sympathize with her or is this yet another instance of Woolrich dividing our reaction?

Six months slip by. Danny lives in luxurious loneliness and Katie refuses either to come back or to take money from him but gets a tiny furnished room and a job as waitress in a chain restaurant like Ivy in the 1935 "No Kick Coming." Then Josephine Ellerton—back from Europe, crazy for Danny as ever and blissfully ignorant that she spent her captivity in his old apartment—gives Katie $500 to take a train to Chicago and secure a quickie divorce. When Danny learns of this he socks Josephine in the eye and races to the 125th Street station in the nick of time to yank the wad of bills from Katie's hand as she's buying her ticket and dash away again. At this point Beefy Avalon decides that Danny knows too much and must be rubbed out, forcing our hero to go into hiding just as another young hood who knew too much had hidden from another gangster named Beefy in Woolrich's 1936 suspenser "Johnny on the Spot."

Early in Part Four Katie discoveres that she's pregnant; so pregnant indeed that she's about to give birth! (If you're tempted to wonder why she didn't know sooner, remember that Woolrich was an only child, a recluse and homosexual.) With Mother McGovern as midwife she delivers, offstage of course, a fine son. Meanwhile Danny has kept a date on the crowded street to return her $500 to Josephine Ellerton, whose last name has magically changed to Wacker, but Beefy's hit men spot him on Fifth Avenue and puncture him with a dozen slugs. "Do I have to go now?" he gasps. Turns out that he doesn't. As soon as the doctors have patched him up he is visited in the hospital by Katie, who doesn't bother to tell him that he's a father. Realizing that none of them will be safe as long as Beefy is free, Katie takes Danny's gun, which has magically changed from an automatic to a revolver, and leaves her baby in Mother McGovern's care, and puts on an evening gown and wig and come-hither makeup, and drops in at the Curfew Club, where in record time she learns that Beefy is on the run from the cops and hiding out at the Bordeaux, an Upper Broadway hotel obviously modeled on the Marseilles. She rents a room in the building, pumps a talkative chambermaid, effortlessly learns the number of the room where Beefy is holed up—under his own name!—tips off the police and holds Avalon at gunpoint until the squad car arrives. The McGovern family is joyously reunited at the fadeout.

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Fourteen short romances and a serial, over and above the dozens of crime and suspense stories Woolrich was pouring out at white heat as the Depression years blended into the years of the Second World War. Perhaps someday the best of these forgotten Woolrich efforts and the best of the short romances he wrote in the late twenties and early thirties will be collected, if only in a limited edition, and shared with Woolrich's legion of readers. May I propose a title for such a wish book? *Love and Night.*

Members of Woolrich's family. UPPER LEFT. George Tarler, Woolrich's maternal grandfather. Taken in Scotland in 1910. UPPER RIGHT Dora Tarler Silverberg, a sister of George Tarler and great-aunt of Woolrich. Taken in New York in 1915. LOWER LEFT: Dr. Sigmund Tarler, a brother of George Tarler and great-uncle of Woolrich, with his son Paul Tarler, who became a dentist and was on the faculty of Columbia Presbyterian Medical School. LOWER RIGHT: Sam Tarler, another great-uncle of Woolrich. *Photos courtesy of Syd Cassyd,* a second cousin of Woolrich.

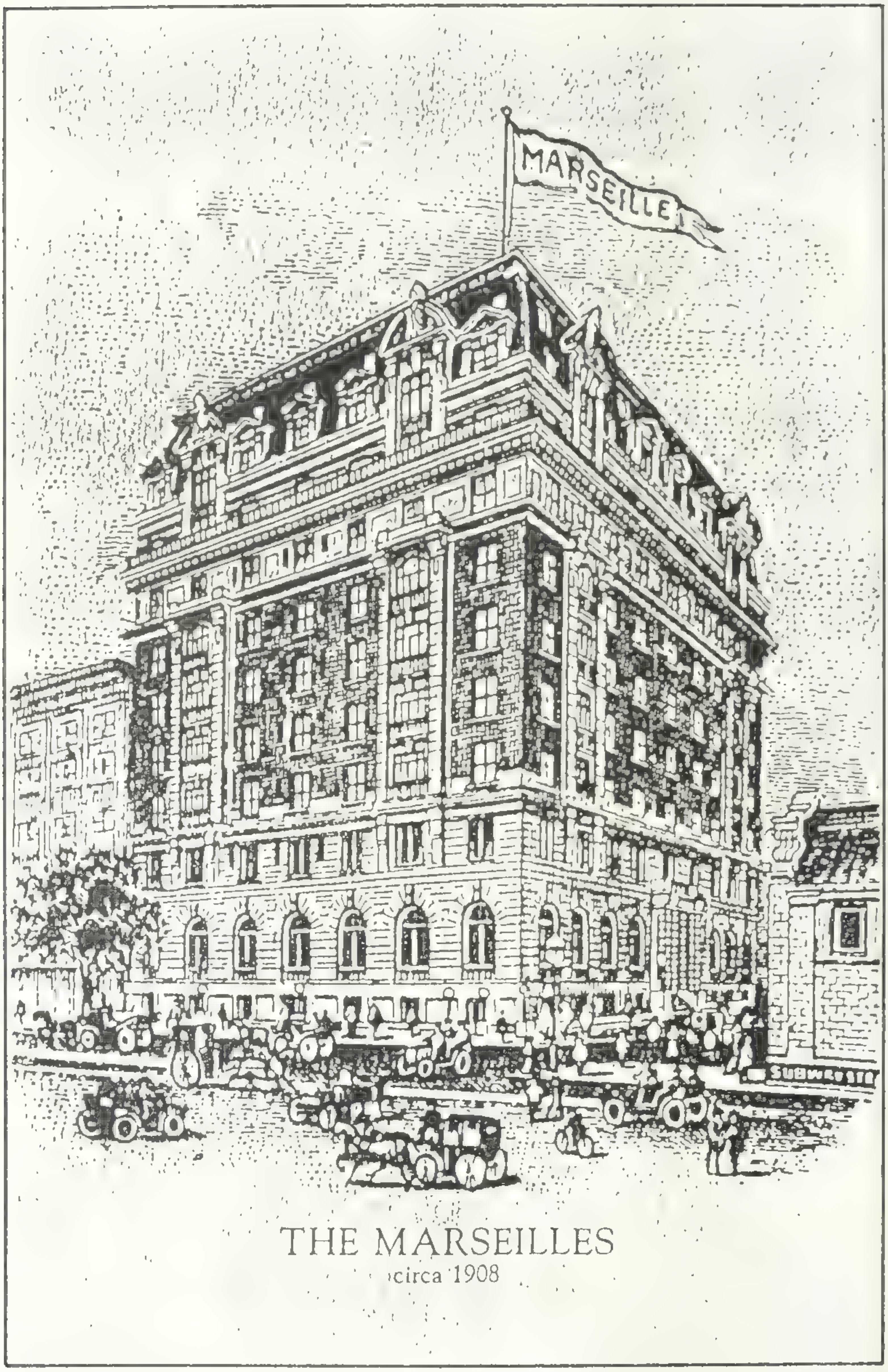
Woolrich in 1927, after his second novel, *Children of the Ritz*, had won the first prize in a contest sponsored by College Humor and First National Pictures.

Woolrich in the late 1920s.

J. Stuart Blackton, pioneer film-maker and founder of Vitagraph Studios, discussing a script with his older daughter Marian in the middle 1920s, a few years before he was to become Woolrich's father-in-law. *Photo courtesy Anthony Slide.*

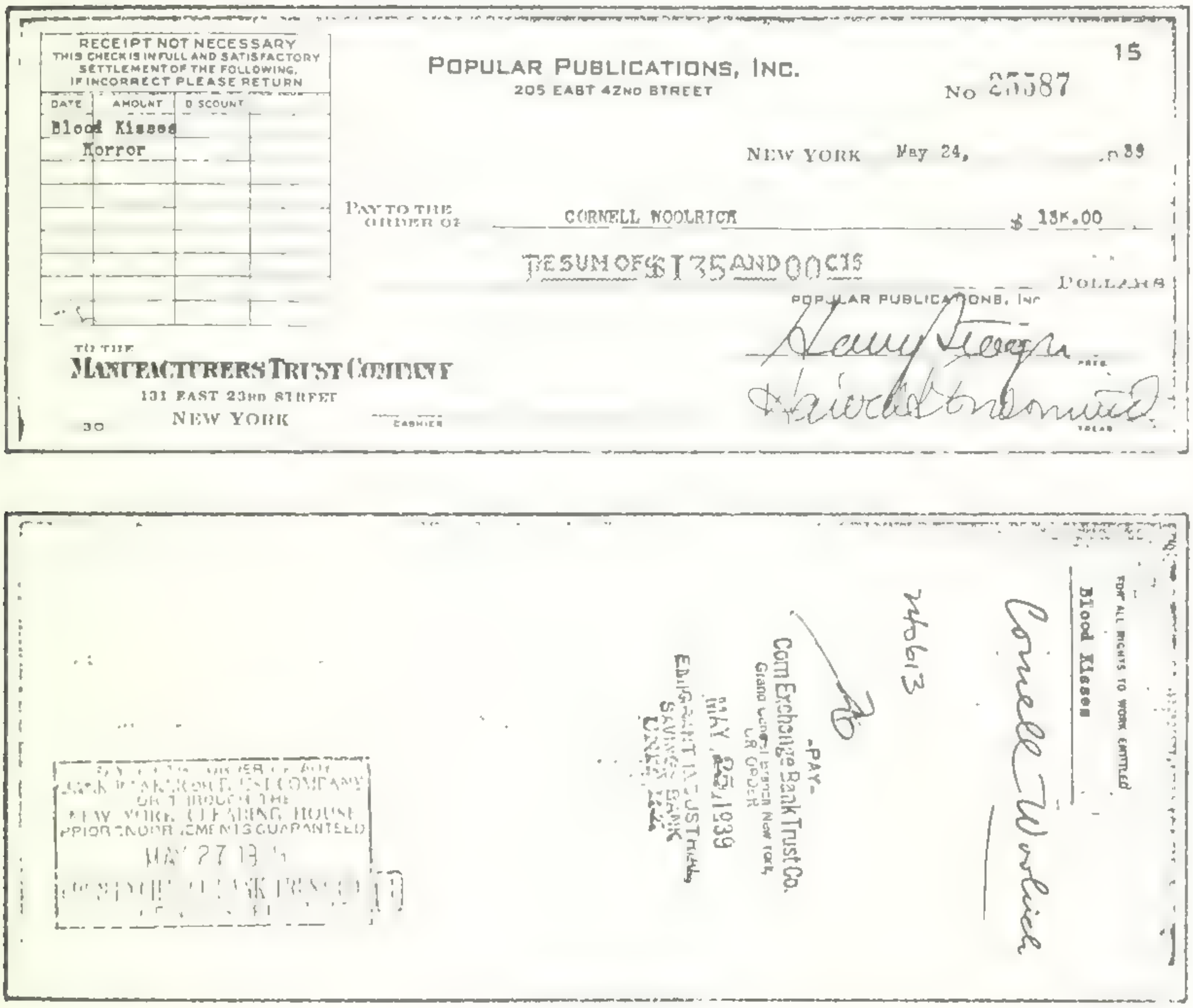
Woolrich with Gloria Blackton at the time of their brief and disastrous marriage late in 1930.

Marian Blackton, *seated,* with her half-sister Violet Virginia (also known as Gloria and as Bill), a few years before the latter met and married Woolrich. *Photo courtesy Anthony Slide.*


MARSEILLES
SUBWAY
THE MARSEILLES
circa 1908

Artist's rendition of the Hotel Marseilles, where Woolrich and his mother lived from the early 1930s until her death in 1957.

Photocopies of front and back of one of the dozens of checks Woolrich received for his pulp stories during the late 1930s.



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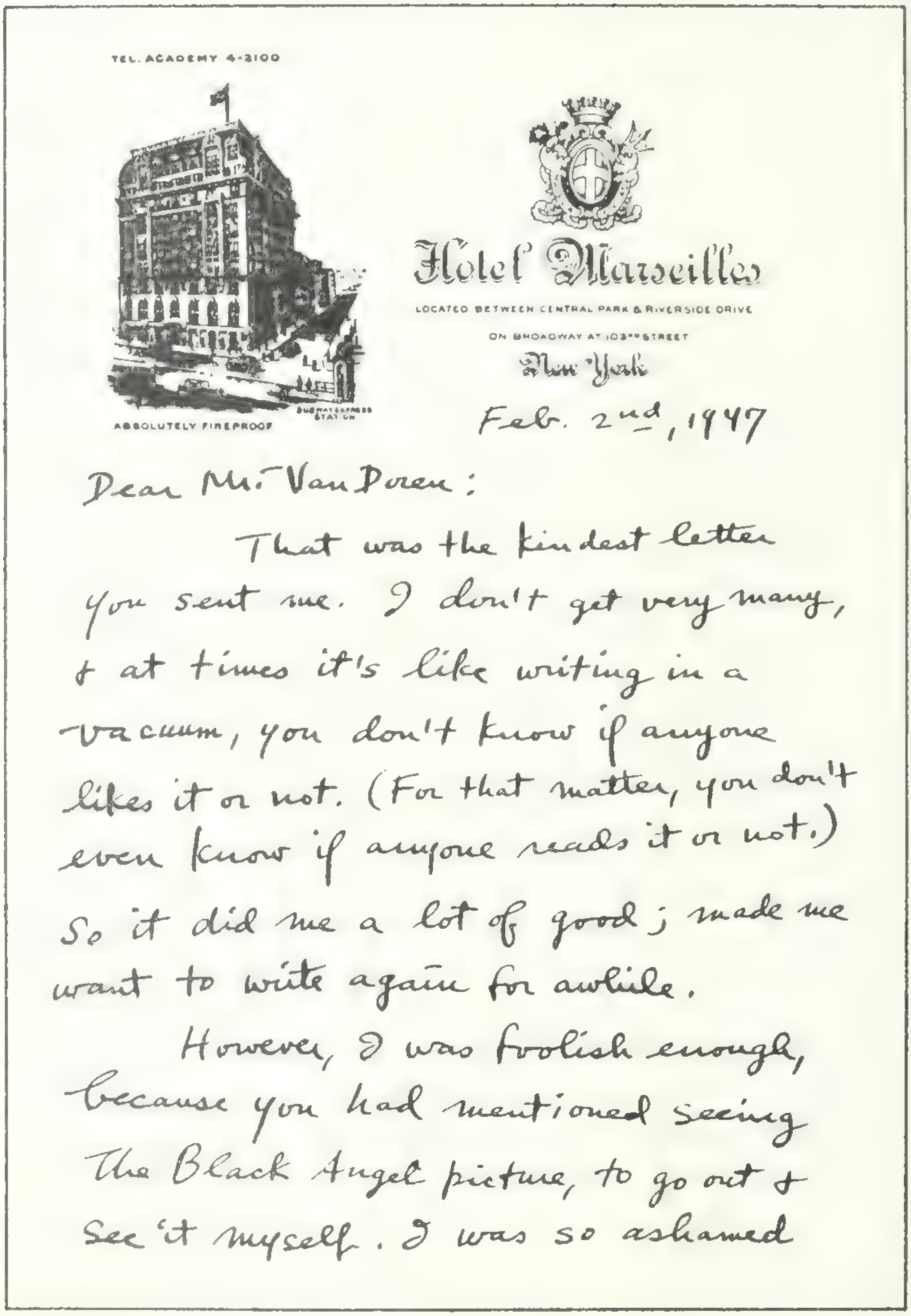

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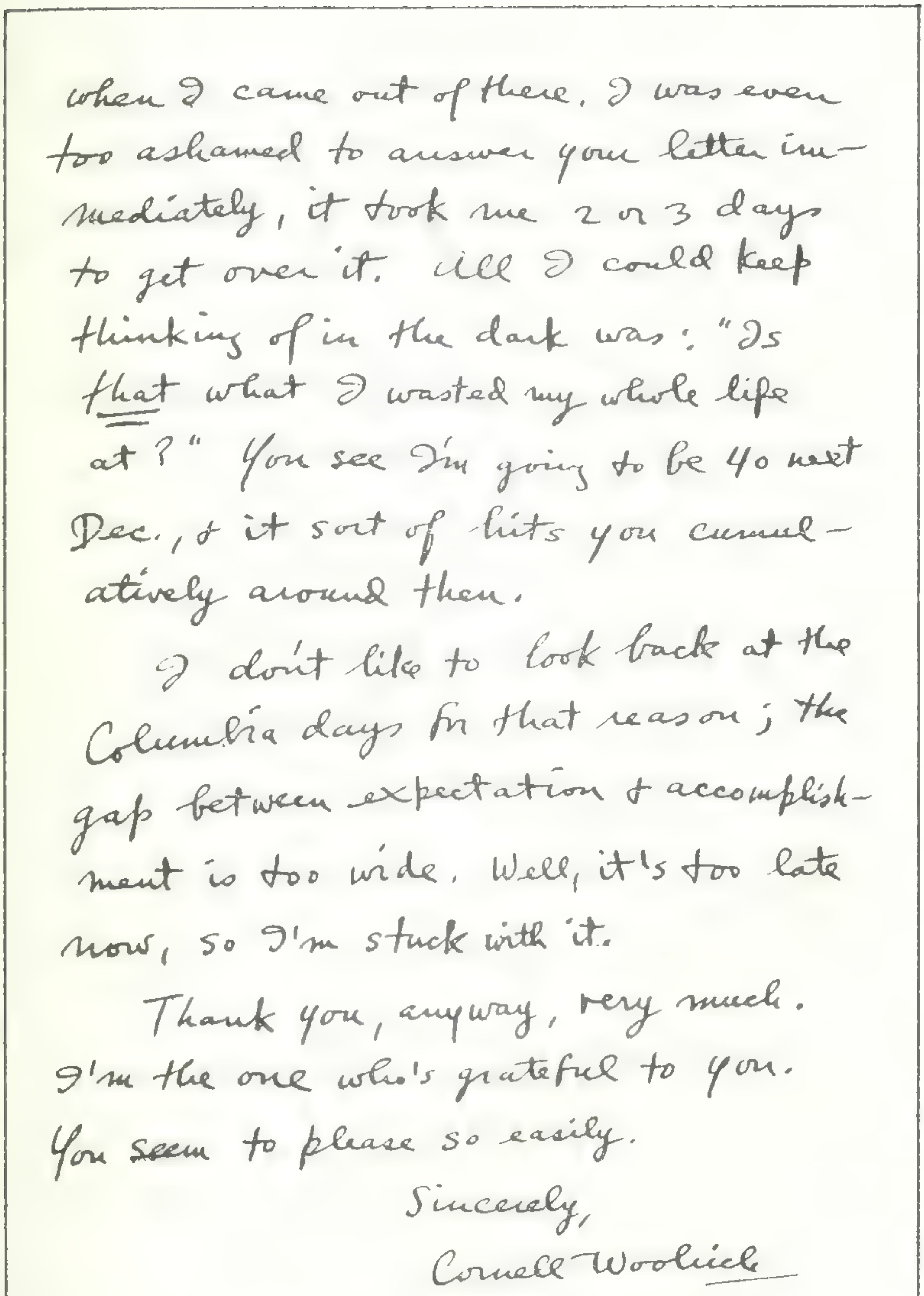
Dear Mr. Van Doren:

That was the kindest letter you sent me. I don't get very many, & at times it's like writing in a vacuum, you don't know if anyone likes it or not. (For that matter, you don't even know if anyone reads it or not.) So it did me a lot of good; made me want to write again for awhile.

However, I was foolish enough, because you had mentioned seeing The Black Angel picture, to go out & see it myself. I was so ashamed

Photocopy of a handwritten letter from Woolrich to Columbia University professor Mark Van Doren, February 1947.



when I came out of there. I was even too ashamed to answer you letter immediately, it took me 2 or 3 days to get over it. All I could keep thinking of in the dark was: "Is *that* what I wasted my whole life at?" You see I'm going to be 40 next Dec., & it sort of hits you cumulatively around then.

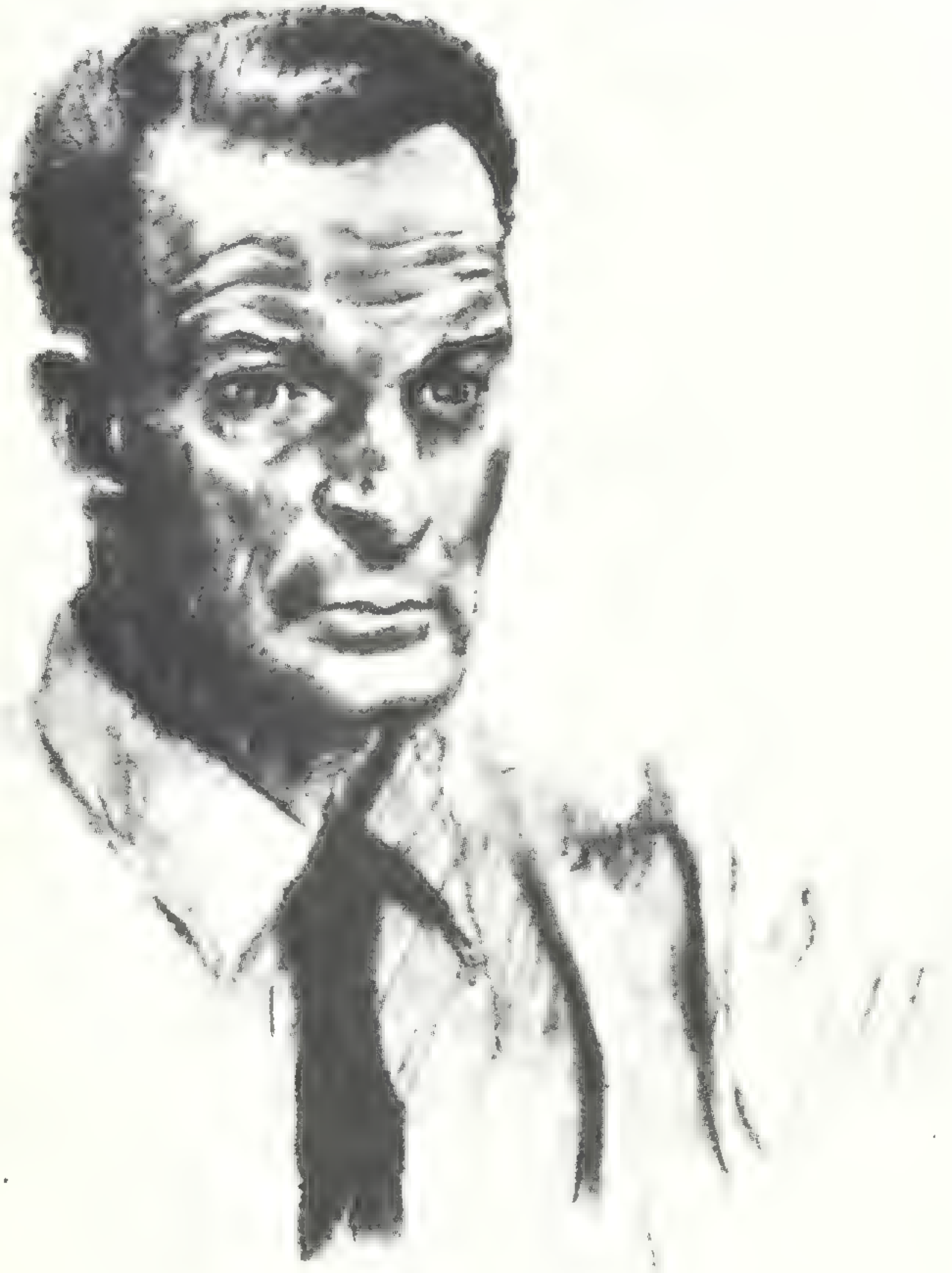
I don't like to look back at the Columbia days for that reason; the gap between expectation & accomplishment is too wide. Well, it's too late now, so I'm stuck with it.

Thank you, anyway, very much. I'm the one who's grateful to you. You seem to please so easily.

Sincerely,
Cornell Woolrich

Woolrich in 1958, posing before framed dust jackets.

Another photograph of Woolrich in 1958, stressing his gaunt and haunted aspects.



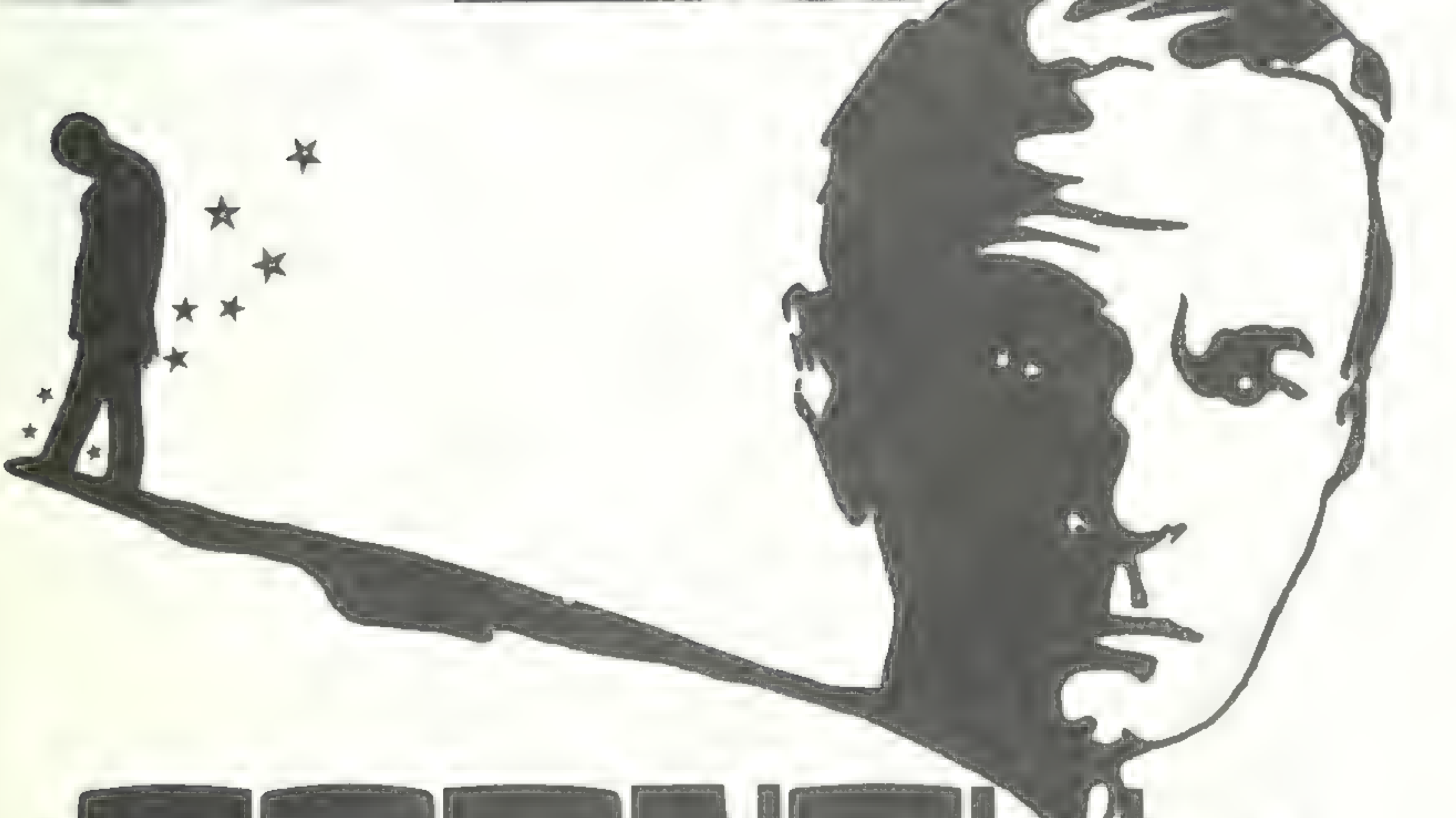
CORNELL WOOLRICH

Artist John Gaughan's somewhat idealized sketch of Woolrich as he appeared in the early 1960s.

The unidealized Woolrich from the same period, with his beloved Remington portable and the Edgar he was awarded by Mystery Writers of America in 1948.

Woolrich at the end of his life.
Photo courtesy Michael Avallone.

Artist's rendition of Woolrich and his world.


CORNELL
WOOLRICH

EDWARD G.
ROBINSON
shocks the screen
awake in
NIGHTMARE
KEVIN McCARTHY
CONNIE RUSSELL

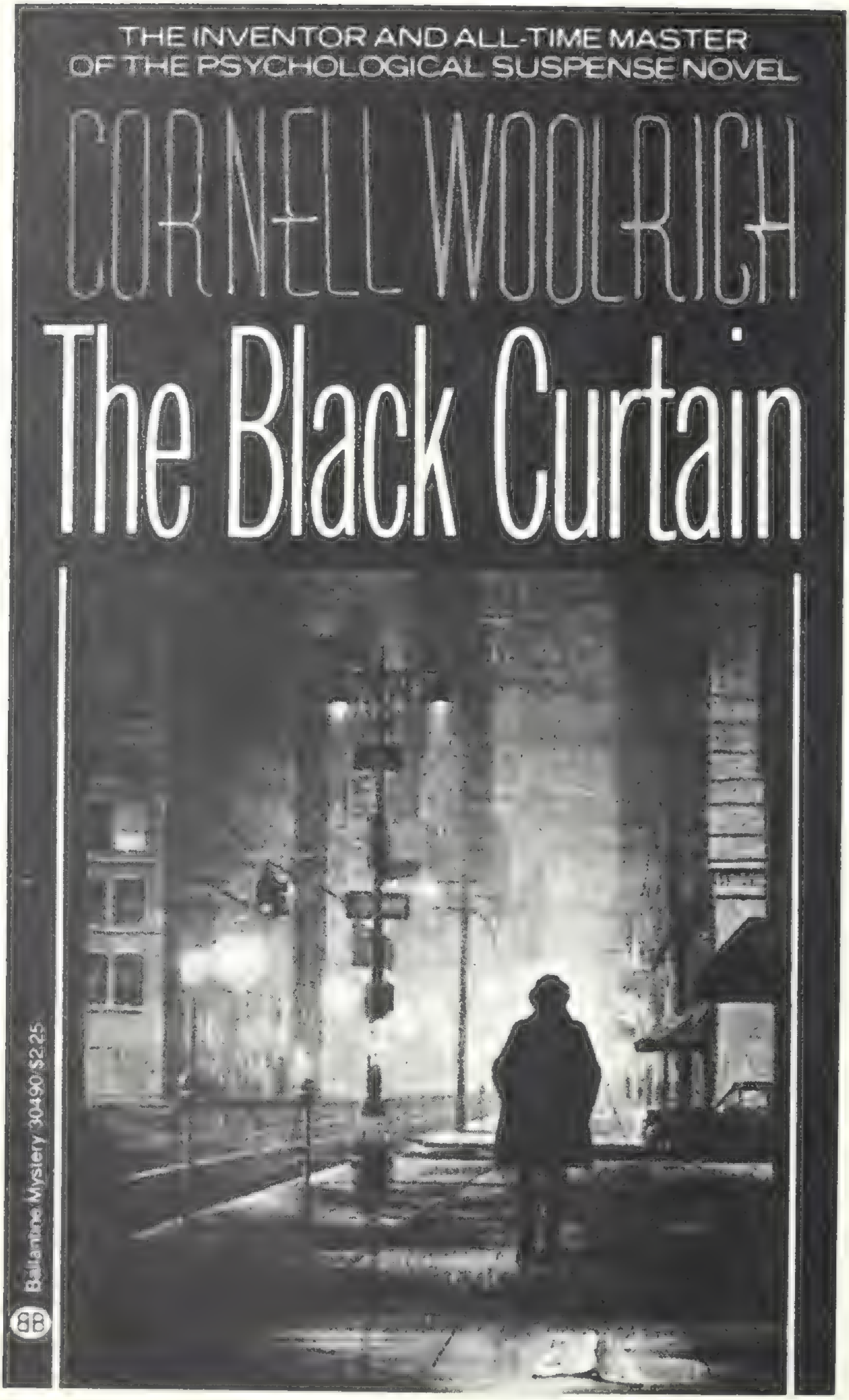
Two lobby cards advertising *Nightmare* (United Artists, 1956), the second movie based on Woolrich's 1941 novelette "And So to Death."

EDWARD G. ROBINSON
shocks the screen awake in
NIGHTMARE
KEVIN McCARTHY · CONNIE RUSSELL
UNITED ARTISTS

THE BOY CRIED MURDER

Two lobby cards advertising *The Boy Cried Murder* (Universal, 1966), the second of the three movies based on Woolrich's 1947 novelette of the same name.

THE BOY CRIED MURDER
in COLOR
VERONICA HURST · PHIL BROWN · BEBA LONCAR · TIM BARRETT · FRASER and MacINTOSH
CORNELL WOOLRICH
A Carlos Ayala Production in association
A UNIVERSAL PICTURE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OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUSPENSE NOVEL
CORNELL WOOLRICH
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One of Larry Schwinger's superb cover illustrations for Ballantine Books' paperback reissues of the major Woolrich novels in the early 1980s.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Woolrich's productivity in the field of short fiction was down again in 1940—a paltry fourteen suspensers and no romances at all!—but this time the reason is clear. He devoted at least part of the year, probably the spring months, to writing his first full-length novel since he'd thrown the manuscript of *I Love You, Paris* into the garbage back in 1933. The new novel was purchased by the first editor who saw it. By the time it was published, in December, all or just about all of his pulp stories for the year had hit the stands and gone.

The first and last of his three 1940 appearances in *Argosy* were no great shakes but the second proved to be a *noir* classic. In "Señor Flatfoot" (*Argosy*, February 3, 1940), which Woolrich submitted as "O'Rourke from New York," we are treated to yet another pulper about revolution in a banana republic. O'Rourke, an NYPD homicide dick on assignment to pick up a prisoner in the capital city of Zacamoras, happens to be on hand when the government is overthrown by a pair of half brothers and their ragtag rebel army. Generals Inocencia and Angelito Escobar are portrayed exactly like all the other Latin American revolutionaries in Woolrich's fiction since the 1930 *A Young Man's Heart*: as fat, stupid, sadistic and totally corrupt. After a day of appropriating the city's treasures and a night of carousing, General Angelito is stabbed to death before dawn in his commandeered suite at Zacamoras's only hotel and the booty is snatched from his bedside. General Inocencia is ready to have a firing squad shoot the brother and sister who had been Angelito's last visitors but O'Rourke pleads for a little time, which Inocencia reluctantly gives him, and sets out to save the couple by proving to the apelike *jefe* before the deadline that the real killer and thief is one of the rebel officers. The race to save the innocent from execution is played out in such a primitive setting that this story comes very close to being a Woolrich Western, and the vividness of physical detail suggests—despite the contrary evidence of the 1938 disaster "Wild Bill Hiccup"—that he might have made a first-rate Western writer had he chosen to follow that trail.

But that tale fades into insignificance beside his next in the magazine, "All at Once, No Alice" (*Argosy*, March 2, 1940), the first of the two classic annihilation stories which he wrote a few months apart, the other being "Finger of Doom." Both take off from the same premise: a lonely and obscure young man has miraculously found the one right woman, but just before the consummation of their relationship she vanishes into nothingness. Everyone who apparently had known and seen the woman denies that she ever existed, and the police to whom the young man frantically appeals for help can't find the slightest proof that she walked the earth. Convinced that the woman is a figment of the man's lunatic imagination, they kick him out contemptuously and abandon him to maniacal despair—all but one lone-wolf cop who's willing to believe that the young man just might be telling the truth. It's one of the most powerful premises in *noir* literature, and in both of his novelettes on the theme Woolrich wrings it dry of emotional torment and existential dread. Store clerk Jimmy Cannon, the narrator of "All at Once, No Alice," impulsively elopes with a housemaid named Alice Brown whom he knows hardly at all. They stop at the residence of a roadside justice of the peace and are married in the middle of the night, then drive on to the nearest big city but, thanks to the presence of a huge convention, can't find a room in any decent hotel. Finally the night clerk at the Royal agrees to let Alice sleep on a cot in a tiny cubbyhole room due to be repainted in the morning, while Jimmy spends what's left of his wedding night at the YMCA. Next day, when he comes to the Royal to reclaim his bride, the cubbyhole is empty, Alice's name is gone from the register where she had signed in, and the clerk and bellboy swear that no such person ever set foot in the hotel. Even the justice of the peace who joined Alice and Jimmy in marriage denies that he performed the ceremony. All the cops whom Jimmy begs for help treat him like a lunatic except for one loner named Ainslie, and in the novelette's final scenes he and Jimmy replay the nerve-stretching cliffhanger from 1939's "You'll Never See Me Again," racing against the clock to save the protagonist's wife from being buried alive. Woolrich is without equal when it comes to making us shudder at nothingness, but a flop when the shadows must be dispelled, and the explanations at the end of this story range from nonsensical to nonexistent. But with its perfect Woolrich title and perfect Woolrich situation, explored with awesome word magic, it remains a pure gem of *noir*.

No greater contrast could be imagined than between the wild intensity of "All at Once, No Alice" and the fairy-tale ambience of "Cinderella and the Mob" (*Argosy*, June 23, 1940). It's another tale told in first person by a female, but our viewpoint character this time is a sixteen-year-old high-school girl, and Woolrich fails wretchedly at making us live in her bobby socks. Penny Richards, bored and restless with her safe sane life and longing for excitement, is more than a little reminiscent of Pauline Foy, the protagonist of Woolrich's 1930 romance *The Time of Her Life*. One evening while her parents are at the movies and she's home nursing a sore throat and studying, the phone rings. The caller, who's trying to reach a notorious finger woman known as Chicago Rose, has dialed the wrong number and idiotically mistakes the croak of this naive adolescent for the voice of the gun moll. Penny is too innocent to understand what the caller wants but decides to have a bit of fun by playing along with the gag. Over the next few thousand words Woolrich rings endless dumb changes on the same corny joke as our sheltered heroine impersonates Chicago Rose and takes literally every piece of gangster slang she hears. It seems that these bad guys had already spent a fortune setting up a phony night club, even before they tried to call Rose, for the sole purpose of having Rose lure a rival hoodlum named Brennan to the club where they're waiting for him with machine guns. If this strikes you as an ass-backward way to plan a rub-out, would you believe that not a single one of the bad guys catches on that the teenager they've spilled the beans to is not a denizen of the underworld? Eventually Cinderella does make contact with Brennan—to warn him of course and not to help with his murder—and the man turns out to be a burnt-out father figure much like *The Time of Her Life*'s Jay Willoughby. In the final scenes of the story Penny and Brennan are scrambling across rooftops and up and down apartment staircases one jump ahead of the bad guys' bullets. It's an excellent whizbang sequence, but all the preceding events that made it possible are straight out of a sitcom. In France, where the tale was made into a movie, this preposterous effort was taken more seriously than here, but then the French think Jerry Lewis is a genius too.

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Detective Fiction Weekly published four Woolrich stories in 1940, a pair of throwaways alternating with two classics of suspense. In "Death in Duplicate" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 17, 1940) homicide dicks Bailey and Hastings are assigned to a series of jewel robberies and ice-pick murders sharing the same *modus operandi*. Eventually they pin the crimes on a sinister roadhouse proprietor, lock him up, prepare for his trial—and then become flabbergasted when, just before the trial is to begin, there's another jewel robbery and ice-pick murder with the same *modus operandi*. This copycat ploy wouldn't fool a real-world cop or most readers either, but Woolrich's cops swallow it hook-line-and-sinker, all except the smart dick Bailey. The clue that cracks the case is clever enough but the story is routine except for the portrayal of the protagonist's sadistic underside.

"Finger of Doom" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, June 22, 1940) is Woolrich's second annihilation classic within three months, and its link with the first was described perfectly in 1945 by Anthony Boucher (1911–1968), the dean of crime fiction critics, who called it "the story of a man who simply watched his girl go to deliver a parcel (she wouldn't take a minute), and then—all at once, no Steffie." The setting is New York, and Kenny, the narrator, is thirteen days away from marrying his girl. He picks Steffie up after work for dinner at Rafft's and the hit Broadway show *Heavensabustin*, but before they eat she tells him that her boss has asked her to drop off a package for him. They detour to an old brownstone divided into flats and Kenny waits on the sidewalk while Steffie presses the buzzer, is admitted, goes upstairs—and never comes down again. It's as if the house had swallowed her whole. And when Kenny frenziedly runs to the police for help, and plainclothesman Dick Gilman goes around with him to check out his story, not only can he find no one who saw the woman, but every last person in her life—employer, landlady, everyone—swears she never existed. When Gilman has just about decided that the desperate young man at his side is insane, Kenny knocks the cop out and starts tearing headlong through the night city, searching for something, anything, that will prove he's not a madman and will bring his love back to him. This time the cliffhanger climax and wrap-up explanations almost make sense, but as always with Woolrich, the power lies in the nightmare, not the awakening. The title under which he submitted this unforgettable thriller was "Wait for Me Downstairs" and *DFW* paid him $200 for first publication rights.

"The Detective's Dilemma" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, October 26, 1940) is another of the mechanical exercises that Woolrich cranked out all too often and tried to palm off as tales of pure detection. Inspector Burke of Homicide is visited one morning by Arnoldo, Prince of Iveria, an exiled hemophiliac nobleman who claims that his lovely American wife has fallen in love with a race-car driver and is trying to rig an "accident" so that Arnoldo will bleed to death. In due course just such an accident takes place and the prince accuses his wife with his dying breath, although he doesn't bother to tell the physician at his bedside as any sensible person in his position would have done. When Burke interviews the widow, she describes the psychological hell which the prince had put her through, and admits that in the past she had tried to arrange one or two fatal "accidents" for him, but swears she had nothing to do with the mishap that actually killed him. The evidence supporting her version of events is the exact mathematical equal of the evidence confirming the prince's version, and the detective's dilemma is: Whom Shall I Believe? It's a variant on the plot of 1939's "Crime by the Forelock," where the cop had to break a similar evidentiary tie between two prime suspects, and even though this rewrite is more emotional, Woolrich does nothing to make us give a damn one way or the other. In the *DFW* letter column for February 15, 1941, a woman hemophiliac pointed out to editors and readers that in real life the disease descends through females and not, as Woolrich blithely assumed without checking, through men. But even if he'd gotten his facts right the story wouldn't have been improved.

"Murder Always Gathers Momentum" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, December 14, 1940), better known under its reprint title "Momentum," is a Fugitive story in the same vein as 1937's "Dusk to Dawn" and "Goodbye, New York"—and also of the same high quality. The Depression is still choking the life out of people in this tale, whose protagonist Richard Paine is almost penniless after having been legally cheated out of his wages by his ex-boss Ben Burroughs. On the night Paine's headlong run to doom begins and ends, he goes to Burroughs's house to beg for some money. Fate/chance/God decrees that Burroughs should open the safe in his study while Paine is outside, pacing the sidewalk, groping for a way to approach the man. Seeing Burroughs counting out money, Paine makes the crucial decision not to plead for what is rightfully his but to break into the house that night and steal the money from the safe. Fate/chance/God then decrees that while Paine is bent over the safe, working on the combination, Burroughs should catch him red-handed, and that in their struggle over a gun Burroughs should be killed. Woolrich falls all over himself as he tries to stop us from seeing Paine as simply a victim of impersonal forces. In several easily dispensable asides he preaches to us from on high that because for a split second Paine freely willed to pull the trigger during that struggle, and also because at root the man is a yellowbelly, he deserves whatever happens to him. This aspect of the story can't be dismissed as the lunacy of a warped fictional character: quite clearly it's Woolrich himself speaking to us. Then the real nightmare begins as Paine flails his way across the New York darkness, running for his life, piling up a second and a third murder in his hysterical terror, desperate to survive long enough to get himself and his wife out of the city before the police kill him. Of all the Woolrich stories about a person marked for destruction, this is one of the most haunting and perverse, and even the O. Henry twist works perfectly.

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The earliest known adaptation of any Woolrich tale for the relatively new medium of dramatic radio was broadcast in the spring of 1940. All that we know about this elusive episode comes from a few sentences in writer Jay Neugeboren's extensive Afterword to his friend Martha Foley's never-finished autobiographical memoir *The Story of STORY Magazine*, which, as we've seen, includes some fascinating lines about Woolrich. According to Neugeboren, in 1940 Foley and Whit Burnett, to whom she was still married, attempted to launch an airwaves version of their beloved periodical, "to bring to radio listeners the same quality of vital literature that has made *Story* the outstanding literary magazine of the day." The dramatic anthology series *Tonight's Best Story* was heard on Tuesday evenings at 9:30 P.M. over independent New York station WHN, each radio play being based on a tale previously published in the magazine. Neugeboren doesn't give the date on which the series debuted but radio historian Ray Stanich has determined that it was April 16, 1940. According to Neugeboren, that first episode was introduced over the air by Rex Stout, the immortal creator of Nero Wolfe, and was based on Woolrich's 1936 classic "The Night Reveals." The program does not survive on tape and nothing else about it is known. *Tonight's Best Story* continued on the air until October 1 of that year. Since Woolrich's financial records show no payment for any radio rights during 1940, he apparently gave permission for the broadcast free of charge.

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In the month that Woolrich's fiction was first brought to the radio audience, *Black Mask* published the first of his two stories that it ran during the year, an untypical effort and rather hard to swallow. "Post-Mortem" (*Black Mask*, April 1940) is set in the middle-class suburbs and rigged not for suspense but for irony within irony. One fine day Josephine Mead Archer is descended upon by a pack of newspaper reporters who insist that she's just won $15,000 in the Irish Sweepstakes. Since she had never bought a ticket herself but somebody had clearly bought one in her name, she decides that the winning slip of paper must have been purchased by her recently deceased first husband Harry Mead shortly before his death. And after she and her new husband Stephen Archer spend two days and nights combing through Harry's belongings, they conclude that the winning ticket must have been in the pocket of the suit the dead man was buried in. What is eventually unearthed is not just the crucial slip of paper but a natural death that a killer thought was murder, an unintended murder that everyone had accepted as a natural death, and a murder-in-the-making that the killer hopes will pass as an accident. The climax is totally incredible and depends on split-second timing worthy of a slapstick comedy. "Sort of crazy, isn't it?" detective Westcott remarks at the end. "But sort of neat." He's half right anyway.

"C-Jag" (*Black Mask,* October 1940), better known under it reprint title "Cocaine," recalls "All at Once, No Alice" in that it's the first of two novelettes Woolrich wrote a few months apart on a *noir* situation that no other writer in the world could have created. I call it the Living Nightmare story line. A young man comes to after a blackout episode of one sort or another and is haunted by the memory of having done something horrible while out of himself. Now that he's back in the waking world he tries to shrug off the memory as the residue of a bad dream, hangover, drug dose or whatever. Then he finds an objective fragment from the nightmare on his person, and then he finds another, and before long he is on the edge of madness. In a frenzy of desperation he appeals for help to his brother-in-law, who is a cop, and like most Woolrich cops, as ready to hang those in need of aid as to help them. The two men go back into the shadows together, hunting for the answers. It's a powerful and chilling springboard for suspense, and—thanks to several movie, radio and TV adaptations of both of Woolrich's variations on the theme—it has become closely linked with him in the public's perception. The protagonist of "C-Jag" is Tommy Cochrane, a jobless young man living on the charity of his older sister Mildred and her husband, Denny the cop. The elements of his nightmare are a nailed-down window, a blood-smeared shirt, a body in a closet, singing walls and a strange key. The cause of the dreadful memory is a toot of coke, just enough to cover a thumbnail. The bottom line of the situation, as Tommy finally confesses to Denny, is: "Last night I think I killed a man." The two then try to retrace Tommy's steps and find the nightmare body in the closet before it's found by someone else and Tommy is charged with murder. The *noir* premise eventually mutates into typical Woolrich pulp whizbang stuff with cardboard-cutout gangsters as the bad guys, but until that line is crossed, "C-Jag" ranks with his finest short suspense fiction.

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The pair of Woolrich tales that appeared in Street & Smith's *Detective Story* during 1940 resembled the *Black Mask* pair in that the earlier was nowhere near as good as the later. "One Last Night" (*Detective Story,* May 1940) follows the pattern of 1938's "The Gun But Not the Hand": a sympathetic young man in a small Southern community is falsely accused of murder in the first half of the story, and a stranger comes to town in the second half, bent on clearing the framed man before he's executed. The opening scenes of "One Last Night" are eerily moving as Denny Burke comes home after a two-year prison stretch to say goodbye to Kathleen Leary, the girl he loves. On a warm Saturday evening, in a dark blue landscape bathed by the moon, he takes Kathleen away from the isolated dance pavilion where she's been waltzing with her new fiancé, the town banker's son, and walks her home one last time through the woods. As they share a parting kiss in the forest, her house key falls out of her purse, and while searching for it the two are separated in the dense darkness. Suddenly Kathleen vanishes, as if the night had swallowed her. But this isn't an annihilation story; her savagely beaten body is found in the woods a few hours later, and Burke, instantly arrested for the murder, is menaced by the threat of a lynch mob. Up to this point the story has been compulsively readable, but now the town is visited by Burke's parole officer, Bill Bailey, who's determined to clear his protégé before the next attempt to lynch him. The way Bailey goes in a few minutes literally from nothing to a full and accurate psychological profile of the real killer—who turns out to be both epileptic and a yellowbelly—makes up one of the most preposterous pieces of pseudo-detection ever perpetrated in the genre.

"The Red Tide" (*Detective Story,* September 1940) is also set in the countryside, a taut oscillation thriller narrated in third person from the perspective of Jacqueline Blaine, who slowly and on the basis of bits and pieces of trivial evidence becomes possessed by the conviction that her husband Gil has murdered their wealthy old house guest Homer Burroughs and stolen the $25,000 in cash that he'd brought to the Blaines' country home with him. As in "One Last Night," Woolrich lets us think for a while that this is an annihilation story, since Burroughs seems to have dematerialized after Gil had driven him to the railroad depot in the middle of the night (or so he claims) to catch the milk train back to the city. But the deepest roots of this story lie in 1937's "The Corpse Next Door," with the variation that this time the murderer's guilt-torn behavior is viewed from outside, not from within. The crucial scene where the putrefying corpse pops out of an auto's rumbleseat "like a macabre jack-in-the-box" owes as much to Poe's "Thou Art the Man" as "The Corpse Next Door" owed to "The Tell-Tale Heart." The killer turns into a wild-eyed pulp madman before the climax and the last-minute rescue is contrived too clumsily, but this is still a breathless suspenser from first word to last.

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None of his three tales published in 1940 issues of *Dime Detective* was as good as "The Red Tide," but together they recapitulate many of the pulpy aspects that dropped away from Woolrich's fiction as the forties and his career as a suspense novelist progressed. "Meet Me by the Mannequin" (*Dime Detective,* June 1940) forms a matched pair with another story published the same month, "Cinderella and the Mob," both being narrated in first person by supremely guileless teenage girls whom Woolrich fails to make credible even for a moment. Eighteen-year-old Francine Everton comes unannounced from the sticks to the Big Town, which is nameless but might have been called New Cork or New Mork, in order to move in with her older sister Jean, who's been prospering in some mysterious line of work. As soon as she arrives, Francie befriends a mannequin in the window of the luxurious "Chalif-Bleekman" department store and starts treating the dummy as her confidante. When she reaches the penthouse where her sister lives, Francie discovers that Jean, very much like Bernice in the 1932 *Manhattan Love Song,* is under the thumb of the evil power in the city, which this time takes the form of Leo Rosetti, a pulp Sinister Nightclub Proprietor. While surreptitiously visiting her sister at Rosetti's club, Francie happens to witness the big boy committing a murder from her hiding place in a wardrobe closet. Jean manages to sneak Francie out of the building in a laundry hamper and then goes half crazy trying to keep Rosetti from learning of the kid's existence. As time goes by, Francie lands a job at Chalif-Bleekman's and meets a boyfriend—who by Woolrich Coincidence turns out to work for Rosetti. Complications keep piling up till we're numb, but somehow the suspense Woolrich meant to generate never reaches the page or our hearts, and the absurdity of key scenes like the gunfight in the store window is enough to set the most sober reader to giggling.

"Flowers from the Dead" (*Dime Detective,* September 1940), which Woolrich submitted as "Death Makes a Personal Appearance," is a pulper of a much higher order, with abundant action and genuine edge-of-the-seat suspense. Los Angeles police detective Tom Walsh is assigned as bodyguard to movie star Persis Grey as she sets out on a personal appearance tour of several large cities to promote her latest picture. One of the scheduled stops is "Develand," where she was born and raised, but she insists that if she's forced to appear there she will die. She refuses, however, to explain what it is that terrifies her, and Walsh's job is to save her without the least idea of whom or what he has to save her from. The explanations at the end are feeble as usual but the action is furious and the tension level high.

Woolrich may have intended "The Riddle of the Redeemed Dips" (*Dime Detective*, November 1940) as part of his New York Landmarks series, for it opens with homicide dick McNeil confronting a bizarre murder at the Metropolitan Opera House just before a performance of *Carmen*. But the story soon degenerates into a potpourri of pulpisms as the case develops connections with a rash of jewel thefts, and McNeil soon finds himself teaming up with a courageous woman cop to crack a ring that blackmails kleptomaniacs into stealing gems for them. It's a solid and vividly written tale, but ridiculous in spots and never terribly suspenseful.

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In the final months of 1939 and the first months of 1940, one veteran mystery writer after another made the great leap out of the lurid ephemeral pulps and into the permanence and prestige of hardcover. Raymond Chandler had crossed over with his classic *The Big Sleep* (1939), Frank Gruber with *The French Key* (1940), Cleve F. Adams with *Sabotage* (1940). Woolrich had spent the last two years conditioning himself for the jump, turning out progressively fewer but longer and structurally more complex pulpers, even though the structure he favored was heavily episodic. It was to be expected that his first full-length suspense novel would also be episodic in nature, and so it proved to be. Its title was *The Bride Wore Black*.

We don't know exactly when he wrote the book. But if we construct a grid of his magazine publications during 1940, and if we backdate each magazine appearance by three months since that was the typical time gap between the sale of a pulp story and its publication, we find a two months' hole in May and June of that year. If indeed that was when the novel was written, it would be consistent with the fact that it didn't appear in hardcover till December, and with the fact that the editor who bought it believed that she was the first one to see it.

As the thirties merged into the forties, the best-known mystery editor at any hardcover publishing house was Simon & Schuster's Lee Wright (1904–1986). During her long tenure she launched the novelistic careers of dozens of topflight talents, ranging from Anthony Boucher (1937) to Craig Rice (1939) to Woolrich (1940) to Harold Q. Masur (1947) to Stanley Ellin (1948) to Ira Levin (1953), and later, after moving to Random House, she continued the good work by purchasing the first novels of people like Donald E. Westlake (1960), Joe Gores (1969) and Bill Pronzini (1971). When I interviewed Wright in 1979, she recalled that she'd first met Woolrich at some sort of mystery writers' social gathering to which he'd wandered in without an invitation. "He said nothing to anybody," she told me. But apparently he was introduced to her and remembered her name and occupation, because not too long after that meeting he sent her the manuscript of *The Bride Wore Black*. "I read it very quickly—I always read books very quickly—and called him at once and said it was magnificent." The news put him "just in a state of euphoria. I never could convince him that anybody who read that book would have taken it."

That was the beginning of a short but intense author-editor relationship—purely professional of course, since Wright was a married woman and Woolrich a homosexual. The curse of working with Woolrich, Wright said, was that once having completed a novel he viewed it with "an absolutely unmixed double reaction. One was that every word he wrote was marvelous, magnificent and shouldn't be changed. And the other was that everything he wrote was terrible, awful, and nobody should read it." The man was a "manic-depressive, absolutely. And there was a while when I thought he was dangerous. . . . We had a penthouse office in the Weber Building on 49th Street and Sixth Avenue. . . . It was a glass house that they'd built on the ninth floor, and I was afraid that he would throw me through the window someday." On the other hand, Wright said, as time went on Woolrich developed "a profound dependence on me, I think because he felt that I knew what he was and didn't mind."

Whenever he brought her a new manuscript, their conversation took the same form.

> He would burst into tears if I didn't say to him: "Cornell, it was absolutely marvelous." You had to keep saying that it was absolutely marvelous. But there was no reassuring him. He'd always say: "Oh, it's no good, it's not good enough for you, I shouldn't even show it to you." That was Step A. Then you would say: "Well, leave it with me, Cornell, let me be the judge of that. I've never read a word of yours that I didn't think was marvelous. Why should you imagine that I wouldn't like it?" "Oh, it's no good, it's not good enough." This would go on for some time, and then he would finally leave and go, and I would read it at once and call him.

It's not surprising that throughout their professional association Wright "never once had lunch or dinner with him." As she put it: "It was very difficult to like him. . . . I felt sorry for him but that doesn't constitute liking him. . . . What I got from Cornell was this absolute idiot adoration, a combination of that and a sense of awe. He was afraid of me. I was not his idea of what a woman should be." According to Wright, it was the same combination of attitudes that Woolrich showed toward his mother. "She was like a small mouse," Wright recalled. "Fat but small." How did she feel toward Woolrich? "She adored him." What were his feelings toward her? "A combination of dependence, adoration, hatred, all the things you'd expect of a homosexual's relationship with his mother." If Woolrich thought he had found a new mother figure, Wright perceived the relationship as extremely uncomfortable and did what she could to keep it on a business basis. Unlike his mother, she did not adore him at all, only his work. "How those words came out of that skinny rat of a man!"

The Bride Wore Black is a strange and unsettling book. There's a touch of unease even in its dedication:

To
CHULA
and
Remington Portable No. NC69411
in
unequal parts

Who but Woolrich would have dedicated his first suspense novel to a typewriter? That he'd been using the same machine since *Cover Charge* doesn't remove the sense of strangeness. Chula, Spanish for "cute," might have been a pet name for his mother, but as we'll see, he dedicated another book to Chula in 1959, almost two years after Claire's death, and without any hint that the dedication was to someone gone. The identity of the Chula in Woolrich's life remains as cloaked in mystery as ever.

The novel he dedicated to her is set in the grim *noir* universe of his short fiction, its twin polestars being fate and chance. Beams fall at random in this world, but the episodic structure is paradoxically rigid and determined. There are five parts, each split into three chapters with parallel titles except for Part Five, which has an extra chapter, a flashback in which we finally learn what motivated the action of the novel. The book as a whole is prefaced by a quote from Guy de Maupassant: "For to kill is the great law set by nature in the heart of existence! There is nothing more beautiful and honorable than killing!" Before we've read a word from Woolrich himself we are prepared for a divided reaction, warned that we are both to empathize with and be horrified by the murderer we are to follow. Each of the novel's five parts is preceded by its own motto—in turn from Rodgers & Hart, Maupassant, Cole Porter, Maupassant and Maupassant yet again—and the effect of these is of random selection, invoking the motif of chance. On the other hand the chapter titles within each part follow an identical pattern, the first entitled "The Woman," the second named for her current victim, the third called "Post-Mortem on ______," and the action within each chapter is identical from part to part, so that we are reminded of a three-step dance, tight and formalized and unalterable, and also of unalterable destiny.

Part One, "Bliss," sets the pattern for everything to come. In the brief and haunting first chapter, "The Woman," the bride of the title leaves her previous existence and transforms herself into an angel of vengeance.

> "Julie. My Julie." It followed the woman down the four flights of the stair well. It was the softest whisper, the strongest claim, that human lips can utter. It did not make her falter, lose a step. Her face was white when she came out into the daylight, that was all.

Julie and a nameless woman friend share a cab to Grand Central Station, where Julie spends most of her money on a one-way ticket to Chicago. They part on the lower track level.

> "Julie, what can I say to you?"
>
> "Just 'goodbye.' What else is there to say to anyone ever—in this life?"
>
> "Julie, I only hope I see you someday soon."
>
> "You never will again."
>
> The station platform fell behind. The train swept through the long tunnel. Then it emerged into daylight again, to ride an elevated trestle flush with the upper stories of tenements, while the crosswise streets ticked by like picket openings in a fence.

Julie's ride ends not in Chicago but at the 125th Street station, where she leaves the train, buys a newspaper, picks a furnished room at random from the advertisement columns, pays two weeks' rent in advance under a new name, then, while unpacking, goes through a series of strangely unsettling rituals. First she takes a razor blade and gashes out her monogram from every piece of clothing in her valise. Then she takes a photograph of a young man and burns it over the washbasin. ("'Goodbye,' she breathed low.") Then she takes out five scraps of paper, each with a name written on it in pencil, and burns them.

> Then she moved over toward the window, stood there looking out, a hand poised at each extremity of the slab-like sill, gripping it. She seemed to *lean toward* the city visible outside, like something imminent, about to happen to it.

Like a beam about to fall?

In the second chapter, "Bliss," we are introduced to Ken Bliss, bright young man about Manhattan, and his equally effervescent if somewhat more primitive best friend Corey. Readers of Woolrich's pre-crime fiction can hardly avoid being reminded of Alan Walker and his sidekick Dale Evans from *Cover Charge.* Bliss and Corey learn from the night doorman that a mysterious young women has walked in out of the darkness and tried to bribe the doorman into letting her wait for Bliss inside his apartment. Although mildly intrigued as any man would be, Bliss doesn't follow up on the incident since he's already in love with another woman. The chapter ends with a chic party in the penthouse of Mr. and Mrs. Elliott, celebrating Bliss's engagement to their daughter Marjorie. Among the party guests is a strange young woman in a black evening gown. Bliss steps out on the terrace for a breath of air. "The lights of the city streaked off below him like the luminous spokes of a warped wheel." He turns the corner of the balcony just as Dick Manning had done a year before at *his* penthouse engagement party in "Vampire's Honeymoon," and there black-on-black in the shadows is the woman. She doesn't identify herself but hints that Bliss has seen her before, then removes the black scarf from her head and lets the wind flutter it off the terrace just out of her reach and asks Bliss to bend over and retrieve it. While he is bent over she does just what Sarah Travis had done in almost the same way to her husband on the deck of the S.S. *Gascony* in 1937's "I'm Dangerous Tonight": pushes him over to his death. Then she calmly walks out of the apartment before anyone knows what has happened.

The third chapter, "Post-Mortem on Bliss," is about the same length as the first chapter and brings into the picture the hunter character, plainclothesman Lew Wanger, who is content to write off Bliss's death as an accident but wants very much to learn more about the dark lady at the fringe of his life. As this chapter ends, and with it Part One, Wanger marks the case "Unsolved."

Part Two, "Mitchell," proceeds on the same blueprint as Part One. The first chapter, "The Woman," is told from the viewpoint of Miriam, the Jamaican chambermaid at a certain seedy apartment hotel which was probably modeled on the Marseilles. Although not cast in the Noble Minority mold—she likes to nip gin from residents' bottles and replace the shot she drank with tap water—Miriam is worlds removed from the racist stereotypes that were all too common in Woolrich's pulpers, and certainly the most fully drawn black character he had created to date. While cleaning the room of a lonely little man named Mitchell, Miriam is interrupted by a strange young woman who engages her in conversation about Mitchell's character and habits. He keeps a gallery of romantically posed photographs of young women on his walls, and after studying them the strange visitor confidently describes to Miriam the ideal that Mitchell has always been looking for and never found. "He's been looking for mystery. An illusion. A type of girl who is not to be found anywhere in this world. Who does not exist outside his own imagination. A rootless creature floating detachedly above the everyday world, with no points of contact. . . ." The point of course is that she is going to become Mitchell's ideal and his destiny in order to become his executioner. In the second chapter, "Mitchell," the victim returns to his shabby life and finds waiting in his hotel mail slot a free ticket to a Broadway play with no explanation whatever. Sensing a momentary escape from the drabness that is his world, he breaks a date with his regular girlfriend, a cheap plump waitress named Maybelle, and goes to the theater and takes his seat in the empty loge box reserved for him—and in the darkness he is joined by the woman he has longed for always, spectrally beautiful, rising out of the folds of her dark velvet wrap "like a nymph out of a seashell." In due course she consents to visit him in his room, coming in by the service stairs, bringing with her a bottle of exotic liqueur. "You're just like I always dreamed of someone being," he tells her, "almost as though you came out of my own head." As of course she has. Their last drink of the evening is the last of his life. ". . . only wanted to make you happy," he moans, writhing in poison agony on the floor. "You have," she assures him. In the third chapter, "Post-Mortem on Mitchell," Wanger learns about the case from the cop it's assigned to and tries but fails to convince his superior that the woman who vanished when Mitchell died is the same woman who vanished when Ken Bliss died. As this chapter ends, and with it Part Two, Wanger marks the Mitchell case "Unsolved."

Part Three, "Moran," which is roughly the length of the first two parts together, opens as expected with "The Woman" chapter. Five-year-old Cookie Moran, who lives with his parents Frank and Margaret in an unspecified New York suburb, is bouncing a ball along the sidewalk when a mysterious young woman says hello to him and starts asking all sorts of questions about his family and school life. In the second chapter, "Moran," Margaret is summoned upstate by a false telegram announcing that her mother is seriously ill, and Frank is left to fend for himself and Cookie. That evening, while he's coping badly with supper, the doorbell rings and a neatly dressed young woman comes in, introducing herself as Miss Baker, Cookie's kindergarten teacher, and offering to help with the housework while Mrs. Moran is out of town. The child doesn't seem to recognize this woman as Miss Baker, but she quickly persuades both Cookie and his father that she is. If Mitchell's dream was a woman of perfect enchantment, Frank Moran's is a woman of perfect domesticity, and "Miss Baker" proves to be a better housewife than Cookie's mother. She makes Moran a delicious home-cooked meal, washes the dishes, sees that he's given his slippers, and spends the evening playing games of hide-and-seek with Cookie while Frank relaxes in his easy chair with a cigar and the paper—until he's lured into the game and winds up being locked in the storage closet under the staircase and suffocating to death. In the "Post-Mortem" chapter, which is by far the longest of the five with that title, Wanger hears of this third death with a vanishing-woman element, visits the Moran house, takes Cookie on his knee, questions the boy—probably the gentlest interrogation in the Woolrich canon—gets him to say that the woman who locked his father in the airless closet was his teacher Miss Baker, and concludes understandably enough that the *real* Miss Baker is the mystery woman in all three of his murder cases. Woolrich Coincidences plus some plausible circumstantial evidence like Cookie's identification lead to Miss Baker's arrest, but then Wanger receives a call at headquarters from an anonymous woman who insists that Miss Baker is innocent, and proves it by reciting so many unpublished details about the Moran murder that there can be no doubt the visitor was she. How she knew of Miss Baker's arrest as soon as it happened Woolrich never bothers to explain. This part of the novel ends like its predecessors with Wanger marking the current case "Unsolved."

"The Woman" chapter of Part Four, "Ferguson," briefly describes a strange woman's visit to a Manhattan art gallery where this Ferguson's work is on exhibit. From studying his canvases she forms an impression of what *his* perfect woman is like, then vanishes "back into the anonymity from which she had emerged." In the "Ferguson" chapter, the artist is interrupted at work by a mysterious woman who entices him into using her as a model. The project for which he engages her happens to be a painting of Diana the Huntress, complete with bow and arrows: it seems that for him the essence of womanhood is the linkage between sex and death. She is posing for him one evening, half naked, an arrow notched in the string of the bow in her hand, ready to let fly, when their session is cut short by a pounding on the door and the studio is invaded by a horde of Ferguson's artsy friends, insisting that it's party time. Among these precious Greenwich Village types is none other than Corey, the best friend of our bride's first victim. For the first time in the novel Woolrich gives us an inkling of real suspense as Corey keeps looking across the studio at the strange model he half remembers having seen somewhere before. Remembering all too well where she'd seen Corey before, namely at the Bliss engagement party, the bride comes on to him and lets him take her to his apartment. But this bride is a virgin: when Corey pushes her toward the bedroom, she finds a pistol of his in a drawer and backs out of the place at gunpoint, leaving the weapon in the hall since after all she is not a thief. At 3:20 that morning, the sexually frustrated Corey leaps out of bed with a cry of recognition and sets out in the darkness to warn his friend Ferguson that his stunning Diana model is the woman who pushed Ken Bliss to his death. But too late: he finds the artist with an arrow protruding through him and the face torn from his last canvas. In the "Post-Mortem on Ferguson" chapter, Wanger questions Corey, who is the first connecting link he has found between any two of the woman's four victims, and discovers that several years earlier Corey, Bliss, Mitchell, Moran, Ferguson and a sixth man had all belonged to an informal cards-and-hell-raising club, The Friday Night Fiends. As the chapter ends, Wanger finds that sixth man.

Part Five, "Holmes, The Last One," seems to be structured along identical lines. There's "The Woman" chapter, which takes place after lights out in a women's college dormitory and introduces a strange young lady, somewhat older-looking than her classmates, who makes a bet that she can bring back a snapshot of herself holding hands with her favorite writer of trashy romances, a certain Mr. Holmes. Then there's the "Holmes" chapter, in which a young woman throws herself or is pushed out of a taxi just outside Holmes's luxuriously remodeled farmhouse estate, a few hours from New York, and wangles an invitation to come in and recover. Also residing in the house are Holmes's black servant Sam and a dowdy woman sent up by a New York employment agency to type the dictated transcript of the author's latest novel. But in this part of the novel Woolrich is playing games with us, and nothing is as it seems to be except what he has led us to *think* is not as it seems to be. By the end of Chapter Two the bride has attempted another murder—using a variant on the old "Doomdorf Mystery" gimmick that Woolrich had exploited in 1938's "The Gun But Not the Hand"—but has fallen into Wanger's elaborate trap and is at his mercy. Then comes a radical break in the ritual structure. In the third chapter of Book Five, "Flashback: The Little Casket Around the Corner," we see what happened on the church steps literally seconds after Julie's marriage, and why she has spent several years of her life tracking down and executing the Friday Night Fiends. But then in the fourth and final chapter, "Post-Mortem on Nick Killeen," we see that the flashback was a hoax, that Woolrich has fooled us and that someone, something—fate? chance? God the malign thug?—has simultaneously fooled Julie. As Wanger tells her the full truth about her husband's death, which dumb happenstance dropped into his lap during the Ferguson investigation, Julie learns that just as she had tricked each of her victims (and indeed just as Woolrich in the previous three chapters has tricked us) so she too has been tricked by a power perverse, malevolent and unknowable; that a tangle of grotesquely incredible coincidence has ruined her life and, through her, the lives of her prey, for no reason whatsoever. At the novel's very end, when Julie understands and says: "It's time for me to go," we know she means that it's time for her too to die.

Reaction to *The Bride Wore Black* fell into two camps. *Newsweek* and several big-city papers hailed it as a brilliant tour de force of suspense.

The *Kansas City Star* called it "a delicacy for epicures," and the *Hartford Courant* described it as "the most exciting experience in crime fiction this reviewer has had in some considerable time." The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* characterized Woolrich's techniques as "fresh and tremendously effective," with the *Baltimore Sun* adding: "If it doesn't freeze your blood, then you are immune to literary chills." The most interesting remarks on the novel were by the reviewer for the *Pittsburgh Press*, who holds the distinction of having first made the connection between Woolrich and the world's foremost director of suspense films: "If you can imagine Alfred Hitchcock's writing a novel the way he directs a movie, then you have some idea of the drama and breathless suspense of *The Bride Wore Black*." On the other hand, the two most influential mystery critics of the time were less than overwhelmed. Will Cuppy of the *New York Herald-Tribune* complained of "an excess of ingenuity in the manner of telling and a pervading pulpiness of matter," and the *New York Times Book Review*'s Isaac Anderson said that "the story takes a lot of believing, and does not make particularly good sense." Perhaps the most perceptive of the early comments was in *The Saturday Review of Literature*: "An opus out of the ordinary, highly emotional and suspenseful, with a surprise finish that turns somersaults in amazingly agile, if implausible fashion. Odd."

Critical reservations had not the least effect on *The Bride Wore Black*'s success, which continued throughout Woolrich's life and beyond. About six months after its hardcover publication by Simon & Schuster, a condensed version appeared in the Summer 1941 *Detective Book Magazine*. Grosset & Dunlap issued a hardcover reprint edition in 1942. Three years later came its first appearance in paperback (Pocket Books pb #271, 1945), in which the prefatory quotations from Rodgers & Hart and Cole Porter were replaced by lines from Poe and the social philosopher Herbert Spencer. The Winter 1952 issue of *Two Complete Detective Books* included another condensation. Then came a new paperback edition under a new title (*Beware the Lady*, Pyramid pb #80, 1953). Four years later it was selected by Anthony Boucher as the first title in Dell's Great Mystery Library (Dell pb #D186, 1957), and seven years after that publication it popped up in yet another paperback Great Mystery series (Collier pb #AS606, 1964), this time accompanied by a glowing Boucher introduction. In the last full year of Woolrich's life it was reprinted yet once more (Ace pb #G699, 1967). More than a dozen years after his death it was chosen for test marketing by Harlequin Books, whose consultant on the project was none other than Lee Wright, and its sales record helped launch that publisher's mystery imprint under which it was reissued again (Raven House pb #60072, 1981). Finally, three years later it was reprinted in Ballantine Books' package of all the major Woolrich novels (Ballantine pb #30487, 1984), with a stunning cover illustration by artist Larry Schwinger. If the future resembles the past, there are bound to be several more editions before the end of the century.

How does *The Bride Wore Black* stand up almost fifty years after it was written? Boucher in his 1964 introduction praised the novel to the skies for its evocation of what he called "terror-in-the-everyday [which] is a rare phenomenon in the suspense novel," and described Woolrich as "a black (his own favorite adjective) magician whose spells inexorably control the noonday devil and with it the noon of our lives." Of all his novels, Boucher said, *The Bride* was his favorite: "purest essence of Woolrich, sounding like no one else in the business. . . . Start in cold—and find yourself trapped by its spell." Lee Wright echoed this view in our 1979 conversation, insisting: "There's such a vivid imagination in that book."

I disagree. In concept and structure *The Bride* is a fascinatingly ambitious work, but in the execution it strikes me as a clear case of the author's reach exceeding his grasp. Woolrich seems to have renounced the qualities that had made his best pulp stories unforgettable in the quest for a more abstract, philosophic quality that eluded him, and the result is an intriguing but ultimately frustrating misfire.

One of the hallmarks of Woolrich's short fiction was precisely its imaginative vividness, the fruit of a visual storytelling sense so powerful that we could see details of scene after scene unrolling on the screen of our mind's eye. Lee Wright notwithstanding, there is precious little of this cinematic quality in *The Bride.* Almost everything after the first chapter takes place on artificial indoor sets which are described minimally if at all. Whole scenes consist of nothing but dialogue, unbroken even by the conventional "he said," and often burdened by elephantine clumsiness. ("Stay out of here, you damned nuisance of an autograph-hunting, hero-worshiping school brat, or I'll come out there, turn you over my knee and give you a spanking that'll make you need cotton wool someplace else besides your ankle!") When Woolrich does try to convey what a setting is like, for example in the girls' dormitory scene at the start of Part Five, we seem to be reading stage directions. A great deal of *The Bride* suggests strongly that it had first been written as a play script, along the lines of Woolrich's abortive theatrical adaptation of *Cover Charge*, and then hastily reworked into a novel. What has been left out of the novel is the abundant *noir* coloration which its nature cries out for.

The same kind of flaw permeates *The Bride*'s treatment of characterization. In his finest pulp stories Woolrich forced us to live in the skins of the hunted, the trapped, the doomed. In *The Bride* he refuses on principle to involve us emotionally, deliberately erecting a thick shield between us and the characters and events, forcing us to adopt a God's-eye view, denying us the heart-in-the-throat set-pieces of suspense that fill later novels like *Black Alibi* and *Phantom Lady*, refusing to let us empathize with his people and refusing until the last few pages even to tell us what the story is all about. He was probably trying to create on the page a world like the world in the great humanistic films of director Jean Renoir, where, as is said in Renoir's 1939 masterwork *The Rules of the Game*, "The most terrifying thing is that everyone has reasons." What he wound up with was a world in which no one (well, almost no one) has reasons.

If a *roman noir* is to embody Renoir's stunning insight, two rules are mandatory: there must be no privileged viewpoints, and every character must come across as a unique human personality. *The Bride* meets the first requirement beyond question, but falls short on the second. A few of the minor players, like Miriam the hotel maid and five-year-old Cookie, are quite well drawn, and so are two of Julie's victims, namely Mitchell with his drab lonely life and his hunger for an unattainable essence of womanhood (although Woolrich kills him off before we really get to know him) and Moran with his absorption in the modest comforts of bourgeois domesticity. But the others! The Bright Young People in Part One are stick figures. So are the artsy types in Part Four. So is Wanger, obsessively stalking the huntress through the years, the only cop in the Woolrich canon who screams for *noir* characterization but gets nothing. The denizens of Part Five aren't even stick figures but just props in a conjurer's illusion, no more substantial than the characters in those English stage plays where everyone is pretending to be three other people. Even on a conceptual level *The Bride*'s blemishes glare. In its first four sections Woolrich hasn't needed to *explain* anything, but when he reaches Part Five and plays ringmaster to a circus of coincidence within coincidence, we are supposed to be dumbstruck by the randomness and malevolence of the world. At the precise moment that Julie and Nick Killeen come down the church steps, the black sedan with the Friday Night Fiends in it roars across their path, backfiring furiously and belching smoke, and Corey from the window of the house across the street pumps a slug into Nick. "It was a freak of timing that wouldn't have happened again in a hundred years, that couldn't have happened if he had tried to arrange it that way." Julie notes the license plate number of the black sedan but, bent on private revenge, keeps it to herself. Not once does she talk to the police. Not once do the police talk to her. She either doesn't read or disbelieves everything published in the papers about the police hunt for Nick's murderer. At least one other person in the wedding party knows the license number, but the police never succeed in locating anyone in the car that night. Julie tracks down all five, managing to kill four innocent people while just missing two golden opportunities to execute the man she's really after. Some may accept all this—and there's much more in the same vein—as the hand of perverse fate, but for most of us it's a farrago of events rigged so ludicrously we can hardly suppress the giggles. Other Woolrich novels depend on plot gimmicks equally hard to swallow, but they are so much less blatant when he's keeping us at the edge of our seats and the edge of our emotions. In *The Bride,* where he eschews suspense and emotional involvement, his contrivances stand out like W.C. Fields's nose.

But if the novel as a whole is unsatisfying, there are individual elements of a rare power. The notion of the Bride of Vengeance, ritually making death instead of love, surviving for years on her need for revenge, is a stunning addition to the *noir* repertory. The opening chapter with Julie transforming herself into a Falling Beam that breathes is as haunting as anything Woolrich ever wrote. Two at least of her four victims are exceptionally well characterized, and all four of the murder scenes refuse to fade from our memory. Part Three, "Moran," does indeed generate the sense of terror-in-the-everyday that Anthony Boucher saw as the essence of the Woolrich world. Both there and in Julie's cat-and-mouse duel with Corey in Part Four the suspense is managed with enviable skill. When the reviewer for the *Pittsburgh Press* compared this novel with a Hitchcock film he was by no means totally off the mark.

Was Woolrich happy with the book? If all we had to go by was Lee Wright's reminiscences we'd still be fairly certain that he was ambivalent, that he might have loved and adored it one day and despised it the next. But we have more than that. As we'll see in later chapters, a number of Woolrich's subsequent novels can be read as attempts to fix what went wrong in *The Bride,* and his last book in the so-called Black Series, the 1948 *Rendezvous in Black,* is clearly a much improved rewrite of *The Bride* with the sexes reversed.

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Woolrich's advance for *The Bride Wore Black* was the piddling $250 which was standard for beginning mystery novelists at the time. That plus payment for the pulpers he sold in 1940 gave him an income for the year of just over $3,500, the second lowest figure since he'd begun writing suspense fiction. But as December drew to an end, and New York City and the United States prepared for a last Christmas without war, Woolrich might justifiably have felt that for him it had been a very good year indeed. His life as a man remained boxed in that suite at the Hotel Marseilles with his mother and Remington Portable Number NC69411, but his life as a writer was expanding into wider spheres, reviews of his first novel since 1932 were pouring in, and maybe, just maybe, the fame he'd tasted and lost in the twenties would be his again in the forties. A guy can dream, can't he?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Several pulp mystery writers made the breakthrough to hardcover in 1941 but the one who interests us is Stephen Gould Fisher (1912–1980). Born in California, Steve Fisher had spent most of his boyhood at boarding schools, and had run away from a West Coast military academy at age sixteen to enlist in the Navy. During his four-year hitch he had begun writing as a sideline and had sold some stories to magazines like *U.S. Navy* and *Our Navy*, which paid next to nothing. After his discharge and a short spell in Los Angeles he came to New York with hardly a dollar in his pockets. Having somehow talked a little old lady into subleasing him her Christopher Street apartment with no rent paid in advance, he hunkered down and began writing stories for the pulps. Two weeks later, while making the rounds of editors' offices, Fisher met another young man newly arrived in the big town with similar aspirations. It was Frank Gruber, to whom we've already been introduced. Gruber shared with Fisher not only a military service background (he too had enlisted at age sixteen, in the Army) but also, as he put it in his 1967 memoir *The Pulp Jungle*, "the burning desire to succeed" as a writer. The two men became best buddies and their lives from then on ran on parallel tracks.

Fisher's first months in New York during 1934 were a nightmare. Not only did he fail to sell stories, a number of editors and established writers said openly to one another that he never would; that, to backdate a phrase that came into vogue much later, he didn't have the right stuff; that his tales were too intense, passionate, romantic, not macho enough. He was evicted from the Christopher Street apartment, found a five-story walk-up whose Navy-vet manager gave him three months' credit, and was kicked out from there too. On the day before Christmas he was trudging the streets with typewriter under one arm and suitcase under the other. Finally he found a third landlord willing to rent him a room with no down payment. That was what life in 1934 was like for hundreds of writers, not to mention hundreds of thousands of people who never wrote a published word.

Frank Gruber's success in the pulp markets came quickly, and once in the door he helped Fisher get in too. Although Gruber's own forte was fast-paced action stuff, he admired his pal's very different talent and never tired of telling editors "that no better writer exists than Steve when it comes to writing a scene between a man and a woman." Gruber helped Fisher survive in other ways too. At one low point, Fisher recalled, he had maneuvered the owner of a lunch wagon into giving him meals on credit by letting the man read his unsold manuscripts, but the owner's patience had begun to wear thin.

> Just when he was ready to close me out, Frank appeared wearing a tie and all, like a business man. I introduced him as the editor of *Black Mask*, and patting me on the shoulder, Frank told the man: "Steve is a fine writer. One of these days soon we will be buying his stories." That restored my daily 20¢ worth of chili and beans.

In time Fisher too made it into the top-of-the-line pulps, and then into the fabulous slick magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post* that paid in four figures for stories its editors liked. But it's uncertain that there would ever have been a market for his brand of moody, downbeat writing if Cornell Woolrich had not been out there paving the way with his own *noir* classics for the pulps.

Both Gruber and Fisher were captivated by Woolrich's work and would have loved to have him along on their frequent drinking parties, but Woolrich's mother had other ideas. Once, Gruber remembered, "Steve and I were in Yorkville with our wives, having a few beers, and we decided to phone Woolrich and ask him to join us. His mother answered the phone and gave us holy hell—and refused to put him on the phone."

Once in a rare while, however, Woolrich slipped his leash and went out to hoist a few with the guys. Fisher described the way Woolrich looked in the late thirties: "tall, skinny, redheaded, and very pale—the only man I knew during those days . . . who constantly wore a derby." He had "a deep, brooding bitterness" about life "and usually spoke in a discouraged, twangy whine. When delivering a story he'd put it on the desk and say: 'If you don't like it, chuck it in the wastebasket. . . .'" Fisher believed that Woolrich's bitterness stemmed from the smash-up of his earlier mainstream literary career, "the ambition, the dream, the brilliant inner fire ground to ashes." One evening after a few drinks with Fisher and Gruber, Woolrich got the notion that he should place a long-distance call to Hollywood and touch base with H.N. Swanson, who as editor of *College Humor* had bought several Jazz Age tales from Woolrich during the late twenties and who was now one of the top agents in the film capital. Fisher was close enough to the phone booth to hear how Woolrich introduced himself. "'Hello, Swanie,' I heard Woolrich's sad, nasal voice say into the telephne, 'this is that tired, washed-up hack, Cornell Woolrich.'"

Gruber had made the leap from pulps to hardcover mysteries in 1940, a few months before Woolrich had followed suit with *The Bride Wore Black*. Although Fisher had previously sold half a dozen quickie crime novels under pseudonyms to bottom-of-the-barrel publishers, his real breakthrough came early in 1941 with the appearance of his superb *I Wake Up Screaming*. The book is one of the classics of *roman noir americain*, in which the nameless narrator, a newly hired Hollywood screenwriter like Fisher himself, is hounded to the brink of madness by a psychotic cop who has framed him for the murder of the starlet both men loved. The cop is one of the most vividly described menaces in *noir* literature.

> He had red hair and thin white skin and red eyebrows and blue eyes. He looked sick. He looked like a corpse. His clothes didn't fit him. He wore a derby. . . . He was a misfit. . . . He was frail, grey-faced and bitter. He was possessed with a macabre humor. His voice was nasal. You'd think he was crying. He might have had T.B. He looked like he couldn't stand up in a wind.

He is sexually impotent, has a sadistic streak a mile wide, and keeps a shrine of adoration to the dead woman in his room in an old hotel. What is the name of this Noir Cop paradigm? Cornell.

Both Steve Fisher and Frank Gruber catapulted themselves from the pulps through hardcover mysteries (only one in Fisher's case, more than a dozen in the case of the more prolific Gruber) to the top of the heap as screenplay writers at the major studios, earning thousands of dollars a week for most of the war and postwar years. Woolrich had made the leap into hardcover but never did go back to the Hollywood he had thought to conquer with *Children of the Ritz* and never did free himself from the pulps. His 1941 output for the magazines in which he'd honed his art was down to eleven stories, including some unredeemable dreck, some competent hackwork, and a few gems of *noir*.

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Four of those eleven tales appeared in *Detective Fiction Weekly* where his suspense career had started. "He Looked Like Murder" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 8, 1941), better known under its reprint title "Two Fellows in a Furnished Room," is one of Woolrich's most gripping oscillation thrillers, with the Did He or Didn't He situation played out this time not between a heterosexual couple but between two men. The narrator, Stewart "Red" Carr, is asked by his best buddy and roommate Johnny Dixon to leave their apartment one rainy Monday evening so that Dixon can have a crucial private talk with his girlfriend, Estelle Mitchell. Carr is going down the building staircase as Estelle is going up, and he sees her enter the apartment. When he returns three hours later, Dixon is unusually nervous and claims he put Estelle in a taxi at the building entrance just a few minutes before, but Carr knows that he's lying. Like Homer Burroughs in Woolrich's earlier oscillation thriller "The Red Tide," Estelle never completes her journey; and when the police enter the picture it becomes apparent that, like Mr. Burroughs, she never started her journey either. Once her body is found—stuffed into the incinerator chute on the same floor as the Carr-Dixon apartment, her neck broken—Dixon goes on the run, still swearing he's innocent. Torn between helping track down his ex-buddy or hunting for the phantom lady who Dixon insists can clear him, Carr lurches and agonizes through the rest of this long taut novelette. Although Woolrich submitted the tale as "The Fellow I Live With," by the end the two guys aren't roommates anymore.

"Of Time and Murder" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 15, 1941), which Woolrich submitted as "The Clock on the Paramount," is another absorbing suspenser, a Race Against Time story that takes place in the streets and residence hives of New York between 2:00 and 6:00 A.M., with the ticking away of the precious minutes marked by clock faces printed in the text. Taxi dancer Carol Warren is followed home after work by a strange young man who ducks into a doorway at sight of a police car. On a blind impulse without which there would be no story, she invites him into her dingy walk-up flat, where she and Frank Bowder quickly discover that they both come from the same Iowa small town. Carol has failed to make it in the big city and desperately wants to go home but can't: New York is too strong for her to break away. Frank aches to go back to Glen Falls with her, but it's too late: before morning, he tells her, he'll be arrested for a murder he can't prove he didn't commit. Frantically Carol and Frank return to the empty house on East 70th Street where a few hours before, while burglarizing the safe for money to eat with, Frank had found the body of wealthy Stephen Gadsby (the Fitzgeraldesque name is no accident), and the clock race is on as they flail through the night, hoping against hope that they'll be able to catch the real murderer in time to take the 6:00 A.M. bus to Glen Falls together. Woolrich builds great suspense and urgency with the skimpiest of story lines and no space for the thorough *noir* coloration that his premise demands. It's a tale that cries out to be expanded into a novel, and three years later Woolrich did just that, calling it *Deadline at Dawn.*

"Marihuana" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, May 3, 1941) is the last of the intense Headlong Through the Night stories and the culmination of the line of suspense that began in 1937 with "Dusk to Dawn" and continued in 1940 with "Murder Always Gathers Momentum" and was to fizzle out with the 1950 novel *Fright*. King Turner, lonely and depressed over the breakup of his marriage, is pushed into going along with two friends to a "ranch" where they can "blaze some weed," or as we would put it and spell it today, to smoke a few joints of marijuana. Whatever the right name for the stuff Turner inhales, it transforms him into a violent maniac. He kills (or thinks he kills) a woman in the apartment where the dope is smoked, grabs a gun, and goes hurtling through the back streets of New York, a time bomb on two legs, destroying the lives of some of those he happens to encounter and capriciously sparing others, the living symbol both of Man the Doomed and God the Random Butcher. While the police net tightens around him, Turner runs for refuge to the high-rise apartment of his beautiful ex-wife Eleanor, and his nemesis, police detective Spillane, frantically tries to line up Turner in his gunsight before he kills again. It's a riveting suspenser thick with *noir* ambience, and Woolrich's word magic keeps us quivering with tension despite the *Reefer Madness* plot premise that in the hands of any other writer would have us giggling.

"The Fatal Footlights" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, June 14, 1941) seems to have been intended for Woolrich's New York Landmarks series, and for a recluse he captures amazingly well the tawdry glitter of a cheap 42nd Street burlesque house. The plot kicks off when featured dancer Gilda, who performs with her body painted gold all over, collapses on the runway and dies in the arms of one of the men in the audience, homicide dick Benson. In due course we learn that it was the gold paint that killed her—and that someone had stolen the paint remover from her dressing room precisely in order to cause her death without laying a finger on her. So far the story seems to fall squarely within the Bizarre Murder Method pattern Woolrich had used so many times before. But in the final scenes he switches gears and transforms the tale into one of his most chilling Noir Cop thrillers. Benson persecutes and browbeats the dead woman's husband without mercy but can't force him to confess. Then he starts paying secret night visits to Gilda's best friend among the strippers, ranting psychotically about Mosaic executioners and Biblical justice, pushing the woman to murder Gilda's husband in a way as close as possible to the way Gilda herself was murdered. And when the woman finally tells him that she's done what he had pressured her into doing, he triumphantly arrests her for Gilda's murder, then runs out into the night for a Race Against Time to save the life of the poor schlemiel of a husband whom he had set up to be killed as part of his psychological experiment. In the final scene, Benson's lieutenant congratulates him on his strategy, "a damn dangerous one to monkey around with, but it got results this time, and that's the proof of any pudding." As in the previous Noir Cop stories, it doesn't matter whether Woolrich *meant* us to be outraged by this obscenity, the point is that we are and must be. Historical footnote: somewhere along the line this tale seems to have come to the attention of Ian Fleming, who used the death-by-gilding motif in one of his best James Bond novels, the 1959 *Goldfinger.* Woolrich submitted this story as "Gilt Edged Murder."

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Four more of Woolrich's eleven pulpers of 1941 appeared in *Dime Detective,* but this quartet is on a much lower level, and the first is bottom-of-the-barrel stuff with two capital B's. "U, as in Murder" (*Dime Detective,* March 1941) falls into the dreariest of all the standard Woolrich story patterns, Smart Cop Cracks Perfect Crime, or, Suicide? No, Murder! Detective Bright uses one of the most hackneyed clues in the repertory to establish which of three suspects killed wealthy retired stockbroker Rupert Stoll. Woolrich turns somersaults trying to show that it wasn't Stoll but nameless others whose stock manipulations ruined each suspect's life, but the only real interest the story holds is in the wretched details of the three people's existence during the Depression and in the hints of police torture to come. ("A couple of half-hours in the basement ought to get it out of him in black and white.") Overall, the tale is a waste.

The title sounds like an exploit of Perry Mason, but "The Case of the Maladroit Manicurist" (*Dime Detective,* May 1941) is a straightforward whodunit featuring another Bizarre Murder Method, some vivid scenes inside one of Woolrich's favorite places, a barber shop, and, most unusual of all for Woolrich, a protagonist who's a private detective. Scanlan, the newest and greenest P.I. in the Benson Agency, is hired by wealthy and jealous Hedda Palmer to shadow her husband, who's become obsessed with a young manicurist named Joan Blaine.

On the next of Mr. Palmer's all too frequent visits to the tonsorial parlor to have Joan manicure his fingers, the lecherous old man suddenly keels over dead while Scanlan is watching through the shop's front window. The police soon discover that what was supposed to be a bottle of cuticle softener in Joan's manicuring kit is filled with pure nicotine. Scanlan implausibly learns before the fact that Joan is about to be arrested. Since his instincts tell him she's been framed, he spirits her away from the cops and into hiding while he tries to expose what he describes as the "darky in the woodpile." For this routinely readable but undistinguished effort Woolrich was paid $192.

"Crazy House" (*Dime Detective*, June 1941) is one of the most breathlessly paced of all the Woolrich pulpers, packing into less than twenty book pages enough story for a hundred. Civil engineer Bill Ingham returns to San Francisco from the Far East, decides to kill a fog-shrouded evening by paying a call on a young woman named Diana Miller whom a buddy of his had asked him to look up, concludes after a few minutes' chat that the woman he's talking to is an impostor, slips out to call the police, is shot in the arm by a gun-toting butler, finds a cop in the fog, brings him back to the house—and finds that in almost no time the place has been totally rearranged so that, like the protagonists in Woolrich's annihilation stories, he is written off by the police as a dangerous lunatic. Then the officers find a dead body in the house and arrest Bill for murder. He breaks free, runs through the fog-bound night, comes back to the house, wounded arm and all, finds a secret passage and a hidden room and a trio of pulp bad guys holding the real Diana Miller prisoner, and it's whizbang time. The results are never credible for a moment but crudely effective.

With "Murder at Mother's Knee" (*Dime Detective*, October 1941) we are back in the world of 1939's "The Book That Squealed," with a woman protagonist in a stereotypically prim and spinsterish profession who feels compelled to explore an odd quirk she discovered on the job and winds up menaced by evildoers and fighting for her life. Grammar school teacher Emily Prince assigns each student in her class to write a composition about an event that really happened. When she reads eight-year-old Johnny Gaines's "Something That Happened at Our House" she becomes convinced that the boy has inadvertently witnessed a murder. When homicide detective Kendall scoffs at her suspicions, Miss Prince rents a room in the isolated house where Johnny lives with his mother and vicious stepfather and prowls around where angels would fear to tread, determined to find out whether she is imagining things or has stumbled upon an undetected crime. It's a solid and workmanlike thriller but not as evocative as "The Book That Squealed" and not really *noir*. Woolrich submitted it as "Murder Gets an A."

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Woolrich's single 1941 story in *Argosy* is pure *noir* and a classic in the genre, even though essentially it's the exact same Living Nightmare tale he had told the year before in "C-Jag." "And So to Death" (*Argosy*, March 1, 1941), better known under its reprint title "Nightmare," opens with one of the most haunting scenes Woolrich ever wrote.

> First all I could see was this beautiful face, this beautiful girl's face, like a white, slightly luminous mask, swimming detachedly against enfolding darkness. . . . It was so beautiful and so false, and I seemed to know it so well, and my heart was wrung.

Vincent Hardy, a lonely young man existing from one drab day to another in a cheap hotel room, awakens from an exceptionally vivid dream of having killed a man in an eight-sided room with mirrored walls, then finds objective remnants of the dream on his body, in his pockets, all over him, and is obsessed by the certainty that he committed a murder while out of himself. In desperation he confides in his brother-in-law, homicide cop Cliff Dodge, who can't decide whether Hardy is crazy, or engaged in an elaborate cover-up of a deliberate murder, or somehow telling the truth. Together the two men hunt for the house with the octagonal room, behind one of whose mirrored doors there may or may not be a dead man. This novelette is at least twice as long as "C-Jag" and preserves the *noir* edge straight through, without degenerating like the earlier version into a shoot-'em-up with cardboard gangsters. It's one of Woolrich's most powerful (and most reprinted and adapted) shorter works, permeated by the existential terror of being out of control of one's life, of being at the mercy of malignant forces inside one's own flesh. Is this how Woolrich viewed his homosexuality? In any event it's as hypnotically readable today as it was almost fifty years ago.

In terms of quality that story is light years removed from Woolrich's single 1941 contribution to *Black Mask*. "Cool, Calm and Detected" (*Black Mask*, April 1941), which he submitted as "The Absent Minded Murder," is another of those exercises about The Perfect Crime With One Little Slip-Up. Henpecked suburbanite Harvey Ryder, famous for his absent-mindedness, sets out to kill his former business partner Kirk Billings, who had left him holding the bag in a bankruptcy swindle during the Depression. Every reader will have anticipated from the first paragraph of this yawner that Harvey's best-laid plans will be fouled up by his forgetfulness. Only in the scene shortly after the murder where he becomes transfixed with panic over the possibility that he *might* have forgotten something is the story at all rewarding.

Detective Tales, Popular Publications' second most successful mystery pulp, had debuted in August 1935 and was to survive until August of 1953, for a total of two hundred and two issues, but only two of these included a Woolrich story, both of them very short but far from dull. "The Customer's Always Right" (*Detective Tales*, July 1941), which was submitted as "The Finger on Him" but is best known under its reprint title "The Fingernail," is a fine gruesome vignette narrated by retired Inspector Morrow, who invites a friend for a gourmet dinner of rabbit stew (I am not making this up) and tells him about the only case he never solved, involving a murderer who ripped off a fingernail at the scene of his crime and a restaurant attendant who shortly afterward sliced off a finger and made it vanish into thin air. Or thick stew?

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All but one or two of Woolrich's short stories and novelettes for the year had been published by June, when Simon & Schuster released his second suspense novel, *The Black Curtain*. This is the shortest by far of his books, lacking the episodic structure and formal intricacy and heavy-handed plot manipulations of *The Bride Wore Black*, but its premise is all but tailor-made for the Woolrich treatment and its atmospherics and coloration are pure *noir*. Fittingly, it is dedicated to no one. There is only one epigraph, from Robert Browning:

If I stoop
Into a dark, tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time. I shall emerge one day.

Its subject, already much overworked by the early 1940s, is amnesia, but Woolrich invests it with so much emotional power and word magic that we might almost believe he invented it on his own.

> First everything was blurred. Then he could feel hands fumbling around him, lots of hands. They weren't actually touching him; they were touching things that touched him. He got their feel one step removed. Flinging away small, loose objects like chunks of mortar or fragments of brick, which seemed to be strewn all over him.

The date is May 10, 1941, the place a crowded street in a nameless city obviously modeled on New York. Part of a moldering building collapses on a man walking along that street, and becomes a stone womb out of which a new man is born. And like the beam that almost fell on Mr. Flitcraft in the parable Hammett had Sam Spade tell in *The Maltese Falcon*, this act of blind chance alters the man's life forever. Frank Townsend is pulled out of the rubble unhurt except for a few bruises. A boy hands him the hat that had fallen from his head. The initials on its sweatband are DN. He reaches into his pocket for the crumpled pack of cigarettes he always keeps there, and pulls out an expensive gold-banded enamel case, containing a brand of smokes not his own. Foreboding starts to assail him. He takes a bus from the scene of the accident to his own neighborhood and walks up the familiar yet subtly different street on which he and his wife Virginia live. The windows of his flat are filmed with dust, and the janitress tells him that Virginia doesn't live there anymore. He goes to the new address the janitress gives him, and finds Virginia's name on one of the letter boxes. Her maiden name. He rings her bell, and minutes pass "that no one's life should hold." And then she is standing before him, the same yet different like the street where he'd lived, and her hands fly to her mouth in horror and wonder, and Townsend discovers that the last time she had seen him was January 30, 1938—almost three and a half years ago.

For most writers doing an amnesia story, the second blow on the head would have been the end, and Townsend would have begun the slow process of getting to know his wife again and picking up the threads of his former existence. For Woolrich this is only the beginning. The Falling Beam that has restored Townsend to his original self has also wiped out all memory of who and what he had been since the first blow. "My God! What happened to all that *time*? Those weeks, those months, those years. . . . Virginia, I'm scared! Put on the lights, I'm frightened of the dark! Where was I? *Who* was I, all that time?" Woolrich makes us share his protagonist's anguish so vividly that we lose all memory of the absurd prerequisites of the plot—such as that Townsend was carrying not a single scrap of identification on him at the time of either the first or the second blow—just as Townsend lost his memory of three and a half years. As a result, he has no clues from which he can trace himself and no choice but to go back to his old job and his old routine and forget about the missing chunk of his life.

Then one afternoon, when he has left his office and is standing at a bus stop waiting to be taken home, he has a feeling that someone in the street crowd is staring at him intently. And, looking around, he sees that someone is: a dangerous-looking man, with hard agate eyes. An alarm bell goes off in Townsend's heart. He runs from the bus stop. Agate Eyes runs after him. He ducks into the subway, dives into a car just as the train is pulling out. Agate Eyes races down the concrete platform in pursuit, catches up with the car Townsend is in, draws a gun and half smashes in the glass door panel before the subway roars out of the station and into the tunnel shaft. Numb with terror, paralyzed by blind guilt, knowing only that the black abyss of his interim identity has sent up a phantom to destroy him, Townsend says nothing to his wife, doesn't even consider calling the police, just tries to preserve the once again even tenor of his life. Then he sees Agate Eyes again, spying on Townsend's office building from a shoeshine stand, and again, questioning the elevator starter in the building lobby. He quits his job, spends his days sitting aimlessly in the park, terrified by every shadow as twilight falls, hoping against hope that Agate Eyes will not be able to find out where he lives. But he does. In the dark of a certain night, unable to sleep, Townsend slips out of bed and glances out the window and sees strange men half hidden in the building shadows. They've found him. Frantic, he awakens Virginia and they throw on their clothes. Knocks explode on the front door. The phantoms are breaking in. Townsend and Virginia escape through the dumbwaiter into the basement and through a connecting door into another basement and up into the street. There he leaves her, telling her to go upstate to her mother's, while he runs off into yesterday, into his own past, trying to reclaim his lost self. As Book One, "The Curtain," ends, he returns to the street where the beam had fallen. All this tension and anguish, all this torment, in less than forty printed pages!

In Book Two, "The Curtain Lifts," Townsend finds a cheap room on Tillary Street, a narrow enclave four blocks long, choked with poor immigrants, and gets a job washing dishes for eating money, and spends every free moment walking slowly up and down and back and forth, hoping against hope that in his other life he had lived in this neighborhood and that someday someone would recognize him on the street and tell him who he was. Woolrich devotes another forty pages to evoking the quality of his existence: friendless, penniless, "lost between dimensions," trapped on a treadmill of despair. At night, in his empty little room, the lights from the street below throw the luminous image of a window on the wall, a window of illusion that leads nowhere. Weeks pass. Then one day, with thirty cents in his pocket, he hears fire sirens on one of the streets that cross Tillary and follows in the wake of the crowd for no real reason but just to break up the hopeless monotony of his life. And as he is standing there among the overflow of people held back by rope barricades from the blazing building, someone in the window of a neighboring building cries out: *"Dan!"* And at that moment, in the form of a slim and vibrant woman with "overflowing tearful bright brown eyes," the past opens to admit him.

But with it comes new danger too. This woman who runs into his arms on the street clearly knows who he was and knows why Agate Eyes and the other menaces from his lost identity are hunting him, but has no idea that he doesn't know these things anymore, that an impenetrable black curtain hangs between his present and his past, and he doesn't dare put himself in this unknown woman's power by telling her. In the later chapters of Book Two, as she comes to his shabby room on Tillary Street and spends the night with him, Townsend begins to pick up loose bits of information she drops and to assemble them into a hazy fragmentary picture. Over the course of several weeks he learns that her name is Ruth Dillon, that she lives and works in the upstate village of New Jericho, that his name had been Danny Nearing, that they had been lovers, and that whatever separated them had happened nine months before. Then one afternoon he takes his fate in his hands, going to the main public library and asking for the nine-months-old back issues of the newspaper from the city nearest to New Jericho. There he learns that Daniel Nearing is wanted for murder; that he had gone on the run after being charged with having shotgunned to death his wealthy employer Harry Diedrich, in whose house he had worked as a handyman. Townsend's reaction is as ambivalent as we expect from a Woolrich protagonist: he is transfixed with guilt and the sense that he is a pariah, but at the same time he's consumed by the irrational certainty that he is not a murderer. "*I know I didn't do that,*" he insists to Ruth, still not telling her of his amnesia. "Don't ask me to back that up. I can't. I know three people saw me. I know it's in the papers, and on the cops' blotters. I don't care. I don't care if the whole world says I killed that man. *I* say I didn't. The me that's in me says I didn't. . . . I'm going back. It's going to end where it began. One way or the other. Now are you with me or against me? Are you on my side or on theirs? Will you help me or will you let me go hang?" As Book Two ends, Ruth tells him that she would give her own life to save him.

Book Three, "Behind the Curtain," opens on the night Townsend is to return to yesterday. Ruth never shows up at the Tillary Street room to take him back to New Jericho, and after hours of agonized waiting he sets out alone, riding the subway to the main railroad terminal, trying to purchase a ticket on the last train upstate and finding to his horror that he's one penny short of the fare. Then when he retrieves a lost cent in a gum machine and gets his ticket and catches the train at the last possible moment, he discovers that Ruth is also a passenger—and so is Agate Eyes, a few seats away from her. He hides in the men's room for the rest of the run to New Jericho, where he and Ruth are reunited, and she explains that she broke their date because she saw Agate Eyes following her. They hitch a ride to the outskirts of the mansion where Ruth is still employed as a nurse for paralyzed old Emil, the late Harry Diedrich's father, who, like Janet Miller from Woolrich's 1939 "The Case of the Talking Eyes," is confined to bed and a wheelchair, unable to move or speak. Townsend moves into an abandoned lodge on the grounds, out of sight of the main house, which Ruth has fitted up with food and blankets stolen from Harry Diedrich's widow Alma and his brother Bill, who still live in the mansion. Each morning from then on, Ruth wheels old Emil across the property to the cabin so that she and the man she knows only as Danny Nearing can make plans what to do next. Townsend notices that Emil's eyes, which are still good, seem to go into a blinking fit whenever they look at him. After several days Ruth tells Townsend that Alma and Bill are becoming suspicious; and when Alma follows Ruth and Emil one morning and makes a surprise inspection of the cabin, the stage is set for another set-piece of suspense. Having escaped detection by the skin of his teeth, Townsend decides to camp out in the woods for the rest of his stay in the area.

It's only at the climax that this *noir* stunner comes unglued. Townsend finds a note tacked to the cabin door, apparently from Ruth, begging him to come and meet her at the main house at 9:00 P.M., telling him she's discovered something important. At the appointed hour he enters the dead quiet house and is captured by the real murderers of Harry Diedrich, who tie and gag him with Ruth and proceed with their plan, to make it look as if he had broken into the house and killed Ruth before being slain in self-defense. We have moved from the nightworld into the world of the pulp whizbang, and not even a good whizbang at that: not only does Townsend fail to save himself, but Woolrich violates his contract with us to keep us living in his protagonist's mind and skin, and conceals from us some crucial information that Townsend has while yet pretending that we are still in his shoes and know everything he knows. By the end of the night, thanks mainly to a fortuitous fire, Townsend is cleared and three innocent people including Ruth are dead. The next day Townsend demonstrates for the police how Harry Diedrich was killed, and the shotgun murder turns out to have been yet another replay of the old "Doomdorf Mystery" gimmick Woolrich had previously borrowed in the 1938 "The Gun But Not the Hand" and also, with minor variations, in *The Bride Wore Black.* There are all sorts of things we never learn, such as how Townsend wound up in New Jericho after the first blow on the head, or what he was doing on Tillary Street at the time of blow number two, but the most important thing we never learn is how he *feels* about the fact that the idiotic trap he set for the murderers has cost the lives of three innocent people including the woman who loved him behind the curtain. "Life is a circle, isn't it?" he tells the now friendly Agate Eyes as he boards the train back to New York and his wife and his original identity. "We end up like we began." As the train passes the cemetery, Townsend quietly says goodbye to Ruth, "who had given him so much, the past and the future," and the locomotive whistle wails mournfully, and its echo dies away, and the novel ends.

Critical reaction to *The Black Curtain* was more favorable than it had been to *The Bride Wore Black*. Kay Irvin in *The New York Times Book Review* mentioned certain gaps in the continuity but praised the novel as "tense in mood and exciting in event." The *New York Herald-Tribune*'s Will Cuppy hailed its "excitement, mounting suspense and ingenious plot," adding the strange remark that "the last part is the zippiest." One of the longest reviews, in the *Springfield* (Illinois) *Republican*, said that "the story keeps the reader on edge throughout," and that the familiar element of amnesia had "rarely been handled so skillfully" as by Woolrich. The most balanced comments came from *The New Yorker*: "The superb idea of a man who tried to delve into his forgotten and unsavory past has been muffed by the author. [Nevertheless the book is] readable because of its original idea and some cleverly built-up suspense." Naturally enough since the category had not yet been formulated even in France, no one mentioned the word *noir*.

Financially, *The Black Curtain* seems to have been even more successful over the years than *The Bride*. Soon after its publication, Paramount Pictures bought the movie rights for about $2,500, and soon after release of the movie (*Street of Chance*, 1942), CBS purchased the radio rights and broadcast a magnificent thirty-minute adaptation on its classic series *Suspense*. Grosset & Dunlap put out a hardcover reprint edition, and reissued it with stills from the movie after the picture's release. A condensation appeared in the pulp magazine *Two Complete Detective Books* for Spring 1942, and a digest-sized paperback edition followed in short order (Mercury pb #64, 1943). The first softcover of conventional dimensions came out a few years thereafter (Dell pb #208, 1947), and its mapback rear cover makes this version a prized collector's item today. The novel then seems to have sunk into oblivion for about fifteen years, at least in the United States. But a sixty-minute TV film adaptation was aired on *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour* in 1962, a new paperback edition followed on the telefilm's heels (Collier pb #AS317, 1963), and yet another paperback soon after Woolrich's death (Ace pb #H-104, 1969). The most recent softcover edition (Ballantine pb #30490, 1982) features a Larry Schwinger cover which captures the essence of the Woolrich world in a single darkly beautiful image: night, the city, light and shadow, a man alone.

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The year from which one and only one event has survived in the popular imagination, the year when the stock market collapsed, also marked the debut of a new American mystery writer and a new detective character, both bearing the same name. Ellery Queen, who wrote and starred in *The Roman Hat Mystery* (1929), was the creation and the joint byline of two first cousins from Brooklyn, Frederic Dannay (1905–1982) and Manfred B. Lee (1905–1971). The first Queen novel was published in the same season with Woolrich's third mainstream novel, *Times Square*. Long before Woolrich's first short suspensers sold to the pulps, Queen had become world-famous as an author of detective fiction. And by the time Woolrich's first suspense novel was published, Fred Dannay, the scholar and bibliophile of the Dannay–Lee partnership, had earned a separate reputation as one of the foremost historians and connoisseurs of the crime genre. In the spring of 1941, just in time to celebrate the publication centenary of what has generally been considered literature's first detective tale, Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dannay-as-Queen edited a mammoth anthology of short mystery fiction, *101 Years' Entertainment*, which has been universally acclaimed as the finest book of its kind up to its own time (many would add: or since).

By the time *101 Years* appeared, the editing bug had entered Dannay's blood. He had encountered so many fine stories he had no room for even in that gargantuan anthology that he put out feelers for a publisher who'd be interested in underwriting a *quality* magazine of crime fiction, more tastefully packaged and less lurid than the pervasive pulps but incorporating the best of the pulp tradition as well as the best from every other tradition of the genre. In Lawrence E. Spivak, radio personality and publisher of *The American Mercury*, Dannay found the angel he was looking for.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, or *EQMM*, was launched on September 25, 1941, with a media event, a Detective Story Centennial luncheon at the Waldorf-Astoria, broadcast over a coast-to-coast radio hookup and with dozens of current celebs and even a few mystery writers as invited guests. Dannay, who had worked in an advertising agency before creating Ellery Queen and who had a canny sense for publicity gimmicks, was probably the originator of the event. What the luncheon was really celebrating of course was the first issue, dated Fall 1941, of *EQMM*. The magazine started as a quarterly, became a bimonthly after three successful issues, grew to monthly status after the end of the World War II paper shortage and is still alive and well today. Every issue of the magazine from Volume I Number 1 until a few months before his death in 1982 was personally and meticulously edited by Fred Dannay.

It is not known whether Woolrich was invited to that luncheon at the Waldorf, but I suspect he was. If so, it is not known whether he accepted, but I suspect that, recluse that he was, he didn't. There's no doubt, however, that he belonged in that celebration. For among the contents of *EQMM*'s maiden issue, alongside stories by Dashiell Hammett and Margery Allingham and Anthony Abbot (Fulton Oursler) and Queen himself/themselves, was Woolrich's 1938 classic "Dime a Dance." It was the first time any of his short fiction had been reprinted in a prestige publication. Dannay's introduction to the story was Hammett-laconic but spiced with advertising ballyhoo: "A distinguished yarn of the hard-boiled school, with the impact of a machine gun and the jangle of honky-tonk." As if Woolrich's world were the world of the tough-mouthed private eye! Thus began an author-editor relationship that was to last not only for the rest of Woolrich's life but long beyond the grave. Seeing one of his finest tales brought back into print with both dignity and hoopla in *EQMM*, Woolrich may have sensed that his star was once again rising.

In those same fall months of 1941 before Pearl Harbor shattered the country's last hope of tranquillity and plunged us into another global war, RKO released Alfred Hitchcock's latest cinematic thriller, *Suspicion*, starring Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine, and nominally based on Francis Iles's 1932 novel *Before the Fact* but with radical alterations which transformed a cool, suspenseless study of murderer and murderee into an oscillation thriller, essentially of the same sort that Woolrich had been writing at the rate of one or two a year since 1936's "The Night Reveals," with Fontaine playing a young, wealthy and sheltered woman who is charmed by and impulsively marries an irresponsible and financially strapped ne'er-do-well and then, thanks to one apparently trivial incident after another, slowly becomes consumed with the certainty that her husband is trying to murder her. Hitchcock had emigrated from England to the United States only two years before this film. Was he familiar with Woolrich this early in the latter's mystery-writing career? Had he seen that review in the *Pittsburgh Press* where *The Bride Wore Black* was linked with the thrust and mood of his movies? More likely the general similarity between *Suspicion* and Woolrich's oscillation stories was coincidence resulting from the unshakable fact that Hitchcock and Woolrich were nothing less than soul brothers. Within another two years Cary Grant, *Suspicion*'s male lead, would star in *Suspense*'s magnificent radio adaptation of *The Black Curtain*.

That novel attracted Hollywood's attention on its own, and within a few months of its publication Paramount Pictures paid about $2,500 for the movie rights. The film version, *Street of Chance*, released in the spring of 1942, with Burgess Meredith as the amnesiac protagonist and Claire Trevor as the woman in love with his interim persona, restored the boy wonder of the twenties to the memories of studio heads, and other movies based on his work followed at a dizzying pace. But even before *Street of Chance* came out, Woolrich's name and bizarre traits had been enshrined in another film, one with which he had no overt connection. In the last days of December 1941, 20th Century-Fox released its screen version of the Steve Fisher novel *I Wake Up Screaming*, with Victor Mature as the innocent man framed and hounded by a psychotic cop for the murder of the woman they each in different ways had loved. The dead girl was played by Carole Landis and her sister, who is also in love with Mature, by Betty Grable. The Noir Cop role of Cornell went to hulking Laird Cregar, who had as much physical resemblance to Woolrich as Oliver Hardy had to Stan Laurel. But his superb performance, the way his huge bulk flows across the screen like a snake, the way his soft silken voice radiates evil, penetrates to the essence of the character (and of its real-world model?) as only two other performances in film history were ever to achieve. The love scenes and flashbacks in *I Wake Up Screaming* are saturated with boring Hollywood high gloss. But Cregar dominates every moment of his screen time, and whenever he appears, director H. Bruce Humberstone (1903–1984) surrounds him with the menacing chiaroscuro and oozing shadows that within a few years were to become the hallmarks of *film noir*. "What's the good of living without hope?" Grable asks Cregar at one point. "It can be done," he replies in a voice dead and toneless with despair. There is no more perfect Woolrich Moment in all of film. Less than three years later Cregar went on a starvation diet to lose the weight that tormented him, ruined his health and died. He was twenty-eight years old.

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At the end of the year, as the nation reeled from the shock of Pearl Harbor, Woolrich set down in the 1937 desk diary where he kept his financial records his total income for 1941. From short fiction, $2,197, way down from previous years. From novels, just under $2,000, much better than in 1940. From sale of movie rights to *The Black Curtain*, $2,225. That added up to a few cents shy of $6,400. Not that he was capable of enjoying either the money or the heightened prestige that had come with his leap out of the pulps, but at least on his journey from nothingness to nothingness he had perhaps begun to leave a mark.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

In 1942 the United States was at war, but there's no sign of it in the vast majority of what Woolrich published either that year or later in the conflict. The bleak universe of his creation recognized no difference between wartime and peacetime, or between combat with the enemy and Falling Beams. But the menacing and precarious nature of the Woolrich world must have struck sympathetic chords in the hearts of thousands of young Americans who were trapped in the military for the duration of the war, forced to live from day to day not knowing where they'd be tomorrow or it they'd be alive or dead or maimed beyond hope, and in the hearts of millions of their loved ones living with the same terror and uncertainty at home. I don't think it can be coincidence that this situation prevailed during the years of Woolrich's greatest popularity.

His first appearance in print for 1942 was submitted under the unappetizing title "Murder from a Fixed Viewpoint" and published as "It Had to Be Murder" (*Dime Detective*, February 1942). *Dime*'s $225 check for first publication rights was dated September 26, 1941. The story is a skillful oscillation thriller along the usual Woolrich lines but with no emotional tie between the protagonist and the person he slowly and by fits and starts comes to suspect of murder. The action is played out in the back bedroom of a stifling New York apartment where the narrator Hal Jeffries has been confined for weeks by a broken leg. Jeffries is a perfect Woolrich cipher, with no interests, no job as far as one can tell, no books to read, no radio to listen to, no one even to talk to except the black houseman Sam who comes in by the day to clean up. The few passages of dialogue that hint at the Jeffries–Sam relationship are enough to convince us that it's on a level of genuine equality like no other interaction between people of different races in the entire Woolrich canon. Unable to sleep at night and with literally nothing else available to kill the long hot hours before dawn, Jeffries takes to spying casually on the lives of his neighbors in the buildings around the rear courtyard from him. Here for example is what he sees in one place.

> There was a certain light in that one that always went out each night. . . . Something about it, it used to make me a little sad. There was a woman living there with her child, a young widow I suppose. I'd see her put the child to bed, and then bend over and kiss her in a wistful sort of way. She'd shade the light off her and sit there painting her eyes and mouth. Then she'd go out. She'd never come back till the night was nearly spent. Once I was still up, and I looked and she was sitting there motionless with her head buried in her arms. Something about it, it used to make me a little sad.

The point of this and several other thumbnail evocations of his anonymous neighbors' lives is that each of them is just as immobilized in his or her own way as is Jeffries himself.

> The lights started to come on around the quadrangle. Here and there a wall played back, like a sounding board, a snatch of radio program that was coming in too loud. If you listened carefully you could hear an occasional clink of dishes mixed in, faint, far off. The chains of little habits that were their lives unreeled themselves. They were all bound in them tighter than the tightest strait-jacket any jailer ever devised, though they all thought themselves free. The jitterbugs made their nightly dash for the great open spaces, forgot their lights, he came careening back, thumbed them out, and their place was dark until early morning hours. The woman put her child to bed, leaned mournfully over its cot, then sat down with heavy despair to redden her mouth.

In time Jeffries concentrates his attention on one neighbor in particular, a cipher like himself, named Lars Thorwald, who lives with his bedridden wife in the fourth-floor flat opposite Jeffries' window. Then one night Thorwald's habits begin subtly changing, and his wife is nowhere to be seen. An accumulation of trivia—"1. The lights were on all night the first night. 2. He came in later than usual the second night. 3. He left his hat on. . . ."—convinces Jeffries that Anna Thorwald has been murdered. He talks an old friend on the homicide squad into quietly investigating, but all that turns up is proof apparently beyond dispute that Mrs. Thorwald has simply gone upstate for a vacation. Jeffries however clings to his obsession and insists that Thorwald has fooled the police. Then Thorwald becomes aware that eyes across the courtyard are watching him, and the screws of suspense tighten. The what's-wrong-with-this-room gimmick on which the solution depends is reminiscent of the one in 1939's "You'll Never See Me Again," and the story's basic premise is prefigured in earlier Woolrich tales like "Wake Up with Death" and "Silhouette," but in its own terms it's a classic chiller drenched in *noir* ambience. It was to become the best known of all his shorter works after it was reprinted under the far more evocative title "Rear Window."

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That was the only Woolrich story to be published in the first four months of 1942. In April of that year Simon & Schuster released his third suspense novel, the last of his books to be edited by Lee Wright: *Black Alibi*. It was the first time he'd set a full-length work of fiction in Latin America since his 1930 autobiographical novel *A Young Man's Heart* and the first time he'd created a crime novel by expanding a several-years-old pulper to book length. In the great metropolis of Ciudad Real, the third largest city of South America, an escaped black jaguar is stalking through the nightscape. Those whom fate or chance condemns meet the beast in the hours before dawn and are ripped apart. The only person who rejects the official orthodoxy about the animal is a lone Anglo, press agent Jerry Manning, the man who was indirectly responsible for its escape in the first place—and who, as the carnage mounts, becomes obsessed with the certainty that a psychotic human murderer is hiding behind the jaguar's claws.

In a generic sense the novel springs from Woolrich's 1938 pulp novelette "Mystery in Room 913," with its series of apparent suicides in the same hotel room and its lone-wolf protagonist convinced that each of the deaths was murder. But its more immediate source was 1939's "The Street of Jungle Death." In transforming that tale into *Black Alibi*, Woolrich kept almost the entire episodic structure of the original but moved the setting from Hollywood to a nameless country in South America, changed the deadly animal from leopard to a black jaguar, junked the ridiculous plot twist whereby all the mutilation murders turned out to be part of a single diabolical plan, made huge improvements in the characterizations and the prose, and converted the grotesque killer of the pulp version into the hero of the novel. The result is a tour de force of terror, with a sense of existential menace breathing on every page. The five long set-pieces, in each of which a woman we have come to identify with and care deeply about is hunted through the night city by unspeakable horrors, some imagined and some all too real, are among the most gripping suspense sequences Woolrich ever wrote. And if the scene after the final confrontation with the beast explains almost nothing, what rational explanation could do better in this malevolent world?

Structurally the novel owes a huge debt to *The Bride Wore Black*. Woolrich divides the action into six parts. In the first, "The Alibi," the tone is light and almost comic as press agent Jerry Manning persuades his most important and only client, nightclub entertainer Kiki Walker, that it will give her career a boost if she's seen and photographed strolling placidly along the fashionable Alameda with a jaguar on a leash. The mood changes abruptly when the animal leaps out into the street from the sidewalk café where Kiki has stopped for a Martini Seco and bolts into the Callejon de las Sombras, the labyrinth of alleys between the Alameda and the Plaza de los Martires, and vanishes in that network of pencil-thin passages as unaccountably as the women characters had done in Woolrich's annihilation classics "All at Once, No Alice" and "Finger of Doom." The first part of the novel closes with an unsubtle hint that this time the vanished one will return and return again.

> Night brooded enigmatically over Ciudad Real, seeming to hold its breath. Three quarters of a million people, and somewhere in their midst, shadow slim, with velvet tread, and fangs for those who crossed its ill-omened path—.

The effect is almost exactly the same as the end of Part One of *The Bride Wore Black*, where Julie is described as leaning over the city, poised to fall upon it like a beam. In fact the killer jaguar loose in the pulsating heart of the metropolis is a more powerful symbol of fate and randomly striking destruction than the vengeance-crazed Julie ever was, for we are never tempted to identify with this malevolent force—whether it's a blood-lusting animal or a blood-lusting man—as we were sometimes tempted and even encouraged to identify with Julie in *The Bride*. This time Woolrich does not divide our reaction but commits us exclusively to the victims.

If the Woolrich of *The Bride* kept his tone aloof and objective and created too many stick figures no reader could empathize with, he made up for it in *Alibi*, where the writing is intensely subjective and emotional, and we are made to live in each victim's flesh before it is torn to shreds by the blackness at the heart of the world. Part Two, "Teresa Delgado," introduces us to a terrified sixteen-year-old girl, living with her parents and brothers and sisters in a hovel in the aptly named Pasaje del Diablo. On a particular night of darkness, and despite her premonition that the jaguar is near, Teresa is forced out by her mother and told to go to the *tienda* and buy a sack of charcoal so that the *brasero* will stay lit and her father can have a hot meal when he comes home from work. The account of the girl's journey through dismal alleys and a creepy arched viaduct and back again is only the first of this novel's unforgettable sequences. At its climax Woolrich gives us something far more terrible than graphic carnage: he cuts to the mother inside the Delgado hovel, furious at Teresa's infantile fear of the dark, locking the door against her screams until a tongue of red flows in from under the door and licks at her feet. The episode culminates in the functional equivalent of the Post-Mortem third chapter at the end of each book of *The Bride*, with Jerry Manning playing the Wanger role and telling a skeptical Inspector Robles of his hunch that Teresa was not killed by a jaguar.

Part Three, "Conchita Contreras," plunges us into the respectable upper-class world of a young woman, only two or three years older than the first victim, as she prepares herself for one of her surreptitious meetings with her lover in the vast All Saints Cemetery, which she visits all too frequently on the pretext of putting flowers on her late father's grave. But Conchita and her Raul miss each other in the descending darkness, and the cemetery is locked for the night, leaving her trapped inside the walled field of the dead, running madly through the moon-washed silence. "Trees became gnarled shapes bending toward her, reaching down to clutch at her. Monuments became things crouched behind the bushes and the flowers, dropping their heads lower at the moment she skirted by, to rear up again and slink out after her the instant her back was to them. Even her own shadow turned against her now. . . . She was already a little dead." Then she reaches one of the cemetery's high walls, and a motorist passing outside hears her cries for help and goes to get a ladder, and Conchita waits tensely in the darkness thrown by the wall, and hears sounds on the other side, and thinks it's her rescuer coming back, but it's the jaguar. And we recall the inscription on the cemetery's bronze entrance gates.

THAT WHICH IS SO UNIVERSAL
AS DEATH
MUST BE A BLESSING

AND NONE
CAN ESCAPE
ITS BENEDICTION

In the post-mortem scene at the section's end, Manning insists that Conchita was torn apart by a human being, not a jaguar, but his arguments are based on speculation about the probable behavior of a wild animal loose in a city, and Robles and the other investigators laugh at him.

Part Four, "Clo-Clo," takes us back into Ciudad Real's lower depths, and into the life of a poor but feisty semiprostitute who earns tips sexually teasing rich men in nightclubs and bars but makes it a matter of pride never to follow through on her implied promises. When a compassionate old widower impulsively gives her a hundred and fifty pesos, Clo-Clo is convinced that this is her lucky night and starts home through the winding and treacherous alleys, but that is precisely when ill omens start to assail her—a black cat crossing her path, the ace of spades turning up at an impromptu fortune-telling session—and we know she has an appointment with the jaguar. But this time we are fooled: she reaches her shack terrified by her own fears but safe, and now we think the beam won't fall tonight. But then while undressing she discovers that she's lost the one hundred fifty pesos, and forces herself to go back out into the darkness and retrace her path through the web of alleys and find the money. What she finds of course is her destiny, in a street with another ironic name, the Calle de Justicia, whose wall, when Manning and the police arrive, looks "as though somebody had been careless with some kind of overripe fruit." Manning never makes the most plausible argument available to support his theory that these deaths are the work of a psychotic serial killer—namely that it's beyond coincidence that three victims in a row should be beautiful young women—but Robles nevertheless begins to take the possibility at least half seriously as Part Four comes to an end.

In Part Five, "Sally O'Keefe," the viewpoint characters are two vivacious young secretaries who have come to Ciudad Real from the States for a romantic Latin American movie-style vacation, and the ambience is of almost unearthly beauty and peace.

> Through a luminous dust composed of phosphorescent particles of greenish blue and silver, lines of incandescence had been traced, as though someone had drawn a radium-tipped stick through it that left glowing traces. These were the streets and avenues. Around and about was the low black undulation made by the hills against a sky that, where it joined them in the west, was still a glowing turquoise, as though reflecting a hidden row of low-burning gas flames strung out along its base. Up above in the center of its dome it had darkened to night, but the warm rich darkness of semi-tropic night, so lavishly scattered with stars they were like . . . the after-stages of a burst skyrocket.

Not knowing the truth about the jaguar murders, which have been virtually suppressed in the newspapers so as not to cause a tourist panic, Sally and her best friend Marjorie King decide to have dinner n the outdoor restaurant at the edge of the Bosque, Ciudad Real's vast city park. Afterward they engage a horse-drawn carriage to drive them along the dark side paths in the moonlight, and stop at a lovely lake to feed the swans. Suddenly the swans dart back out into the center of the lake, and the carriage horse rears in its traces and bolts headlong down the deserted side road, leaving Sally and Marjorie alone in the night—with the jaguar. In the post-mortem scene, Robles again mocks Manning's obsession with the killings even though this time Manning does point out the absurdity of a wild animal practicing sex and age discrimination in its choice of victims.

Which brings us to Part Six, "Black Alibi," and the climax. Manning visits Marjorie King in her hotel as she's packing to return to the States with her friend's mangled body, persuades her that the jaguar murders are the work of a madman, and proposes to set a trap for the serial killer, with Marjorie as the bait. Woolrich had used this ploy before, for example in the 1938 classic "Dime a Dance," and was to use it again in other tales of the forties, but never more suspensefully than here. After planting a story in the newspapers hinting that Marjorie may know more about the jaguar than she told the police, Manning and Raul Belmonte, the young man who had been Conchita Contreras's lover, shadow her from a distance as she ritually retraces the course she and Sally had taken on Sally's last night, by carriage through the Bosque to the restaurant under the stars and then to the moonlight-frosted lake. The scene is described with a vividness that takes the breath away.

> Lights were flashing everywhere. . . . The sidewalks were like noon under this flashing, blinding, man made constellation. Every table at every café was taken, and taxis swarmed through the streets with a furious twittering of their horns. . . . A sheet of coruscating white flame licked over her form each time the carriage passed beneath an overhanging arc light. . . .

But commingled with the beauty is a sense of subtle unease.

> The lake was deepening in the twilight, from ultramarine to indigo to licorice black, as though ink were being poured into it little by little from some unseen source. The Bosque was sinking into darkness. . . . All the little harmless things that sounded in it in the daylight hours, the birds and insects, were stilled now. A breathless hush hung over everything,

> awaiting the arrival of the greatest killer of them all: night; remorselessly tracking down day and slaughtering it, every twenty-four hours, over and over again. The eternal murder, unpunished, unprevented.

And slowly the unease rises to fear and the fear grows into blind gibbering terror.

> [S]he could still see the trees out there. Whichever way she turned, they were waiting, on three sides of her, out beyond the hedge, as if to say: "We'll get you. You're coming. We'll get you."

The orchestration is perfect. We are ready for the beast, or the man, or whatever it is, to leap out of the darkness and tear another woman apart. *And it doesn't happen*. Woolrich isn't through with us yet. The quarry escapes the trap with Marjorie, and Manning and Belmonte careen through the empty night in a wild Race Against Time and Death to track the beast to its lair in the city before it mutilates its final victim.

That lair turns out to be a ruined church, or more precisely a secret chamber beneath the ruins of a church where unbelievers had been tortured centuries before by the holy monks of the Inquisition.

> Against the wall were strange outlines that the modern mind had no names for: things well forgotten, left behind, as the race progressed away from its childish delight in pulling wings off flies. Chains hanging like fungi, and iron girdles riveted into the wall, and a thing like a hand printing press, to cripple the straight bones nature had formed.

Some of the overtones of the final confrontation come from the Weird Menace pulps, but the power of the imagery stems from its origins in the religion of Woolrich's childhood, and when Manning shovels live coals from a torture device onto the jaguar head of the killer the ironic reversal of Catholic teaching about hellfire is as palpable as the steam rising from the scorched black face. If we were so naive as to expect a happy ending to this odyssey of terror, the wrap-up sequence not only explains almost nothing of what has gone before but evokes an echo from Noir Cop tales like 1938's "Detective William Brown" as Manning and Belmonte resolve to protect the public image of the police by saying nothing about the beast-man's identity.

More than almost any other novel he wrote, *Black Alibi* embodies Woolrich's conviction that the essence of his kind of fiction was the subordination of everything else, including plausibility, to what he alled "the line of suspense." A brief comment in *The Saturday Review f Literature* captured most of the book's strengths and weaknesses in a inimum of words: "Grisly and gruesome chronicle, with super-elodramatic climax. Not quite believable but good fare for those who like their horrors neat." Isaac Anderson in the *New York Times* praised Woolrich's skill at portraying "the horror of the murders and the terror of the victims" but was displeased with both the implausibility of the solution and its unfairness to the reader. Although movie rights to the novel sold almost at once, and a thirty-minute radio adaptation was broadcast on *Molle Mystery Theater* in 1946, *Black Alibi* in book form has never been an overwhelming success. No hardcover reprint house picked it up even after the movie version (*The Leopard Man*, RKO 1943) came out, and each of the first three paperback editions (HandiBooks pb #14, 1943; Jonathan Press pb #J23, 1946; Bestseller Mystery pb#B198, 1955) were abridged. It wasn't until almost a quarter century after first publication that an uncut paperback (Collier pb #02665, 1965) became available. The most recent paper edition (Ballantine pb #30707, 1982) is also unabridged and features another superb cover illustration by Larry Schwinger. I still think it's one of the finest novels of pure edge-of-the-seat suspense Woolrich or anyone else ever wrote.

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Within a month of *Black Alibi*'s publication, the next Woolrich novel began to appear as a six-part serial in the magazine which had been known as *Detective Fiction Weekly* until war-related hard times in the pulp business forced a cutback to monthly production and a corresponding change of name to *Detective Fiction Magazine*. The serial's title, "Phantom Alibi," was confusingly similar to that of Woolrich's then current hardcover novel, which perhaps explains why, when the serial itself came out in book form that August, its title was altered to the far more evocative *Phantom Lady*. The byline on that book was also changed, from Cornell Woolrich to William Irish, and the reason behind that alteration will be given in due course. Three installments into its serialization, *Detective Fiction Magazine* underwent yet another title change of its own, to *Flynn's Detective Magazine*. Confused, anyone?

During the months "Phantom Alibi" was being serialized, *Black Mask* published two new Woolrich novelettes, both among his strongest short fiction of the forties. "Dormant Account" (*Black Mask*, May 1942) is a gem of *noir*, blending the Stepping into Another's Shoes motif, the Headlong Through the Night motif and, in a minor key, the Burial Alive motif, all of which had seen service in many a previous Woolrich pulper. But the dominant theme of the story is perfectly expressed in its first line: "I often think what a strange thing chance is." The time is the late 1930s, before war fever had displaced the Depression. The narrator, a jobless young drifter named George Palmer, happens to pick up an old newspaper from a park wastebasket and stumbles upon a list of unclaimed accounts in one of the city's banks. Instantly he commits himself to the gamble of his life: he will try to convince the bank that one of those accounts belongs to him. The name he picks from the list of missing owners is Lee Nugent. First he does a little detective work, learning enough about the real Nugent so that he believes he can pass himself off as that unknown man. Then he visits the bank, whose officers accept him virtually at face value and in time present him with the contents of the dormant account, a whopping $12,000. Just when Palmer is convinced he is fortune's favorite, everything starts to go haywire, and he finds himself hounded through the city by a psychotic gangster intent on vengeance against the genuine Lee Nugent and satisfied like everyone else that Palmer is that man. The twists and turns that follow are pretty implausible in the cold light of reason, but this is one of those Woolrich classics that defy you to think in normal terms and force you to accept the most ludicrous machinations, saying to yourself what, Palmer says as the story ends: "Gee, life was screwy."

Perverse, malevolent and hopeless are the words for the image of life Woolrich offered in "Three Kills for One" (*Black Mask*, July 1942), which was submitted and later reprinted as "Two Murders, One Crime." This most shattering of all his Noir Cop stories begins like so much of Woolrich's fiction with the last quiet moments in the life of a person marked for destruction. Gary Severn, a typical young middle-class married man, walks down to the corner newsstand for the midnight paper. He happens to reach the stand at the same moment that an off-duty detective arrives there on the same errand. The detective glances at Severn, sees a resemblance between him and the description of a holdup man being hunted throughout the city for the murder of a policeman during a robbery, follows Severn home and arrests him on his doorstep. Ruthlessly pressured by the police, all the witnesses to the robbery-murder identify Severn, who is convicted and electrocuted. Also convicted for taking part in the crime is a small-time hoodlum named Gates. Literally while sitting in the electric chair, Gates confesses to a priest that he is guilty but that his partner in the crime was not Severn but another hoodlum, Donny Blake. The electrocution scene is one of the briefest and most restrained and stunning in the Woolrich canon, with Gates rejecting the priest's spiritual ministrations, demanding that the padre try to save Severn's body rather than Gates' own soul, and saying: "Helen, I love you" (we learn about Helen no more than this) before the steel hood falls over his face and the current fries him. After the double execution, Blake is arrested and identified by the witnesses positively and without official bulldozing, and confesses after a back-room orture session conducted under a police surgeon's watchful eye. At his point word comes down from on high that the case against Blake must be dropped at once.

> "Severn has been executed. . . . There's no way of bringing him back again. The mistake's been made, and it's irretrievable. To bring this guy to trial now will unleash a scandal that will affect not only the D.A.'s Office, but the whole Police Department. . . . I guess they feel they would rather have one guilty criminal walk out scot-free than bring about a condition where, for the next few years, every time the law tries to execute a criminal in this State, there'll be a hue and cry raised that it's another miscarriage of justice like the Severn case."

Therefore Severn is to remain on the books as a murderer and Blake to go free and keep his mouth shut. The only man shaken by these events is a plainclothesman named Eric Rogers, who believes with religious intensity in a balance of justice, and reacts to Blake's release like "a zealot who has just seen his cause betrayed," like "a true believer who has just seen his scripture made a mockery of." Rogers doesn't blame the system, he blames Blake. He resigns from the force and devotes the next three years of his life to shadowing and hounding Blake, carrying on the quest without money or visible means of support, very much like the psychotic Julie in *The Bride Wore Black*, as if his rage for "justice" were all the food and drink he needed. The parallels between the sadistic policeman Javert and the hapless Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* are not coincidence. Rogers eventually drives Blake into such a state of terror that Blake tries to kill himself. Unwilling to allow his quarry so easy a way out, Rogers saves Blake's life. Over the years custom begins to dull Blake's terror, and a grotesque quasi-friendship develops between the hunter and his prey. Finally one evening Blake invites Rogers to his room for a few hands of penny-ante poker along with a buddy of Blake's named Harkness. In the middle of the game there's a freak accident: Harkness shoots and kills himself with Blake's gun. Suddenly Rogers sees a providential chance to restore the balance of justice. He tricks Blake into putting his fingerprints on the gun, rearranges the evidence to suggest that the poker game was for high stakes, then calls the police to report that Blake has just killed Harkness in a gambling quarrel.

> Blake's face was a white bubble. It swelled and swelled with dismay, until it had exploded into all the abysmal fright there is in the world. "I wasn't near him! I wasn't touching it!

> I wasn't even *looking*! . . . . You know that! Rogers, you know it."
>
> Rogers kept holding his own gun on him, with the handkerchief around it. "Sure," he agreed readily. "I know it and you know it, we both know it. You hear me say it to you now, freely, for the last time, while we're still alone here together. And after this once, neither God nor man will ever hear me say it again. I've waited three years, seven months and eighteen days for this, and now it's here. You found a loophole once. Now I've found a loophole this time. Your loophole was to get out. My loophole is to get you back in again.
>
> "Listen to me so you'll understand what I'm doing, Blake. You're going to be arrested in a few more minutes for murder. You're going to be tried for murder. You're going to be—if there's any virtue left in the laws of this State—executed for murder. They're going to call that murder by the name of this man, Harkness. That's the only name that'll be mentioned throughout the proceedings. But the murder you're really about to be arrested, tried, and electrocuted for will be that of a man whose name won't appear in it once. . . . Police Sergeant O'Neill. That's the murder you're going to die for now!
>
> "We couldn't get you for the one you did commit. So we'll try you for another you didn't commit and get you for that instead."

Anyone who thinks Woolrich wants us to *agree* with Rogers, or to see this psychotic as a hero, has wandered off into a Dirty Harry world radically at odds with the world Woolrich creates on the page. The point of "Three Kills for One" as of all Woolrich's previous Noir Cop stories is that these sadists with licenses to maim and kill are the vicars of the unseen malevolent powers that rule the world. "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport." As far back as the 1938 pulper "Never Kick a Dick," Woolrich had been toying with the idea of a cop framing a bad guy for a freak fatal accident after the bad guy had gotten away with causing an earlier death. That story was a shambles. "Three Kills for One" is a masterpiece.

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With the release of *Street of Chance* in April, Woolrich's name at last appeared on the credits of a decently budgeted suspense movie. A few months later his byline first graced an anthology of short suspense fiction when *The Pocket Mystery Reader* (Pocket Books pb#172, 1942) hit the nation's paperback racks. It was the third and last of a oftcover trilogy of sorts. *The Pocket Book of Great Detectives* (Pocket Books pb #103, 1941) had concentrated on the genre's best-known eries characters, and *The Pocket Book of Mystery Stories* (Pocket Books pb #117, 1941) on tales of horror and the supernatural. *The Pocket Mystery Reader* offered just about everything else—poetry, puzzles, articles both serious and funny, a Continental Op novelette by Dashiell Hammett, a radio script by Ellery Queen, and a variety of nonseries stories, including Woolrich's 1940 "C-Jag," rechristened Cocaine" for the sake of readers whom the original title would have bewildered. The editor of all three of these pocket anthologies was Woolrich's book editor at Simon & Schuster, Lee Wright.

The next work Woolrich showed Wright after *Black Alibi* was the novel serialized as "Phantom Alibi" and world-famous today as *Phantom Lady*. Wright, as usual, loved it. But, she told me in 1979, "I wanted him to change one paragraph that did not ring true." His reaction, she said, followed the old familiar pattern.

> Woolrich: "I knew you wouldn't like it, I knew it wasn't good enough for you!"
>
> Wright: "Cornell, I love it, it was wonderful. Just one paragraph! And if you feel strongly about it . . . we'll do it your way. It's your book, you have certain rights, but I wish you'd give it a little thought."

It was too late. "Well, that was the last I saw of him," Wright told me, "and it was the last I saw of the book. He took it right around the corner to somebody else. . . . But I didn't mind losing it because I was honestly afraid of those wild moods of his when he would burst nto tears." He never submitted a word to Wright again.

The "somebody else" who saw the manuscript next was Woolrich's ormer patron Whit Burnett, who by 1942 was divorced from Martha Foley but still at the helm of *Story Magazine*. Although the periodical's radio adjunct, *Tonight's Best Story*, was no longer on the air, Burnett was also operating a book publishing imprint, The Story Press, under he aegis of the house of J.B. Lippincott. As a book editor Burnett was nterested mainly in anthologies and collections of short fiction, but The Story Press was also open to novels, and a contract for publication of *Phantom Lady* seems to have been negotiated with the speed of a bullet. However, one detail had to be worked out before the book's release. Having published three suspense novels under his own name n less than two years, and with more on the way, Woolrich was in danger of glutting the market with his material, and therefore *Phantom Lady* would have to appear under a pseudonym. That at least was the Lippincott executives' position, so Burnett and Woolrich had a meeting to decide on a byline.

Neither man seems to have left any written account of the discussion, but Woolrich later described the meeting to the Fred Dannay half of Ellery Queen, and Dannay summarized the scene in one of his *EQMM* introductions to a reprinted Woolrich story According to the Dannay version, Woolrich opened the discussion by suggesting a surname based on nationality, "like English, French Welsh, Irish . . ." and Burnett broke in and raised his hand and said "I'll buy that!" Thus in two minutes half the new byline was born. As Dannay put it: "The first name was even more quickly arrived at: a common name, intentionally chosen to keep the emphasis and memory value on the surname."

So runs the standard account of how "William Irish" came into being. How much truth is in it we'll never know, but in any event a crucial element has been left out. As we've seen, back in the late 1920s when Woolrich was briefly employed as a screenwriter at Firs National Pictures, the studio had released three silent features directed by Benjamin Christensen, whose titles had been credited to a William Irish. What's the connection between that Irish and the byline on *Phantom Lady* and a host of later Woolrich books? Had Woolrich known the "real" Irish, and dredged up the name from his memory thirteen years later when he needed a new literary identity? If so what had been the relationship between them in Hollywood? Or wa there ever a real William Irish? Could the original Irish have been a Woolrich pseudonym as far back as 1929? But why would Firs National have paid good money for the screenwriting services of the boy-wonder novelist and then not used his name on his work? On the other hand, if there was a real William Irish, what happened to him and why did his name never appear on the credits of any other movie either before the three Christensen features or since? Is this a case o nature imitating Woolrich's annihilation story line?

All we can say for sure is, first, that the new byline stuck—indeed in time it overshadowed Woolrich's birth name to the point that in France, for example, where he's considered a great writer, he's known almost exclusively as Irish and the name of Cornell Woolrich is almos forgotten—and, second, that no perceptive reader could have been fooled by the pseudonym even in 1942. How could anyone hav believed *Phantom Lady* was the work of a newcomer when it had jus been serialized in six parts in the continuation of *Detective Fictio Weekly* as by Woolrich himself?

Phantom Lady is the first Woolrich novel since *The Bride Wore Blac* to include a dedication, and this one, like his last, could have bee written by no other author in the world.

To Apartment 605, Hotel M______
in unmitigated thankfulness
(at not being in it any more)

The hotel of course is the Marseilles, but since Woolrich and his mother continued to stay there for another fifteen years, it's safe to conclude that he had no gripe about the building as a whole. To make any sense of the dedication we must flash forward to the last year of Woolrich's life. "I tried to move out," he said then. "In 1942 I lived alone in a hotel room for three weeks and then one night she called me and said, 'I can't live without you, I must live with you, I need you,' and I put down the phone and I packed and I went back to that place and for the rest of my life I never spent a night away from her, not one. I know what they thought of me, what they said about me but I just didn't care. I don't regret it and I'll never regret it as long as I live." More likely than not he had moved no farther than another apartment in the Marseilles (unless he had checked into a different hotel with the same first initial), but the dedication of *Phantom Lady* is best read as a celebration of his return to his mother's arms.

Woolrich based the novel on his 1939 pulper "Those Who Kill," transposing the story line from Paris to New York but keeping the root premise of the Race Against Time to save the life of an innocent man wrongly convicted of murder. Stockbroker Scott Henderson has been married for five years to the cold and imperious Marcella but the marriage has gone empty and dead and he is in love with another woman, Carol Richman. Marcella refuses to cooperate when he asks for a divorce. In an attempt to win her over, to remind her of the time when there was something between them, he plans a romantic evening for the two of them: dinner, wine, aisle seats at a Broadway show. At the last minute she refuses to accompany him. He calls Carol but she isn't in. Furious, swearing that he'll invite the first decent-looking woman he sees on the street to spend the evening with him in Marcella's place, he storms out of their apartment. The time is almost exactly 6:00 P.M. On impulse Henderson stops for a drink at Anselmo's, a bar several blocks away. There is a woman already seated at the bar, nursing a Jack Rose. She is wearing a very special hat.

> It resembled a pumpkin, not only in shape and size but in color. It was a flaming orange, so vivid it almost hurt the eyes. It seemed to light up the whole bar, like a low-hanging garden-party lantern. Stemming from the exact center of it was a long thin cockerel feather, sticking straight up like the antenna of an insect. Not one woman in a thousand would have braved that color. She not only did, she got away with it. She looked startling, but good, not funny. The rest of her was toned-down, reticent in black, almost invisible against that beacon of a hat.

Henderson invites her to be his guest for dinner at the fashionable Maison Blanche, where he had made reservations for two, and for the hit musical revue at the Casino Theatre, featuring the peppery Latin entertainer Estela Mendoza, for which he had reserved two aisle seats in the front row. The woman in the pumpkin hat accepts the invitation and they agree that they'll exchange no personal information about each other, no names, no addresses, nothing. The number on Henderson's bar tab is 13. They take a cab from Anselmo's to the Maison Blanche and Henderson idly notes that the driver has a bizarre name, Al Alp. After a leisurely dinner they go on to the Casino, arriving late but before Mendoza's number begins. Their front-row seats are only a few feet from the orchestra pit, and Henderson notices that the trap-drummer is staring at the woman as if hypnotized. Mendoza, whose real-world basis was obviously Carmen Miranda, comes on stage and performs, but her big number is ruined when it becomes obvious to her and Henderson and everyone else in the audience that her wild pumpkin hat is the exact duplicate of the hat worn by the woman in the first row. A quiet catlike duel of stares erupts between the two women. Mendoza has to be restrained from jumping down from the stage and starting a fistfight. Somehow the show goes on. At the end of the revue Henderson's date collects both their theater programs and puts them in her purse as a memento of the evening. In the street, as they're fighting for a cab, the woman inadvertently drops her cigarette into the tin cup of a blind beggar working the crowd, and Henderson makes amends by giving the man two dollars. At midnight the two strangers of the evening return to Anselmo's, where they began, and say good night and goodbye. "Now that you've got it out of your system," the woman tells Henderson, "why don't you go back and make up with her?" The last thing he sees as he leaves her at the bar is "the bright orange of her hat peering blurredly through the cigarette-haze and shadows, all the way back there behind him, as in a dream. . . ." When he enters his own apartment again, the place is dark, and then suddenly lit up by two stone-quiet men who don't introduce themselves or explain what they're doing in Henderson's home but coldly start bombarding him with questions. They are the police, but they'll remind anyone familiar with European literature of the interrogators in the first scene of Kafka's *The Trial*. Marcella is lying in her own bed, strangled to death with one of Henderson's neckties, the exact necktie that matches the suit Henderson is wearing. These are the events in *Phantom Lady*'s first two chapters, which are both entitled "The Hundred and Fiftieth Day Before the Execution."

In the third and fourth chapters, which take place on "The Hundred and Forty-Ninth Day Before the Execution," Henderson tries to clear himself of the murder charge hanging over his head by retracing his previous evening's path in company with the police. The time of Marcella's death has been established as precisely 6:08, almost immediately after Henderson stormed out of the apartment. The time he picked up the woman in Anselmo's Bar, he swears, was exactly 6:10. If he can prove that, he's off the hook. The barman at Anselmo's remembers Henderson but swears there was no woman with him. The cabbie Al Alp remembers Henderson but swears there was no woman with him. Everyone Henderson recalls having casually encountered just one evening ago has not the least recollection of the woman in the pumpkin hat. As in Woolrich's annihilation stories, it's as if the city had swallowed her whole. By the end of the day Henderson doubts his own sanity. "I'm frightened; take me back to the detention-pen, will you? Please, fellows, take me back. I want walls around me that you can feel with your hands. . . ." To make matters infinitely worse, Henderson himself has completely blanked out on what his date looked like and can remember only her hat. Naturally enough, he's convicted of Marcella's murder and sentence of death is pronounced on "The Eighty-Seventh Day Before the Execution."

On "The Twenty-First Day Before the Execution," Henderson is visited in the death house by Burgess, the homicide detective who was in charge of his case. Burgess admits that he is now convinced of Henderson's innocence—mainly on the ground that no murderer attempting to manufacture a phony alibi would have done it so ineptly—and recommends that if Henderson has one real friend, one person who would lay down his life for him, he should summon that friend to New York and beg him to find the phantom lady in the three weeks left before Henderson's date with death. Henderson's best friend from before his marriage was Jack Lombard, an oil driller in the mold of the Indiana Jones prototypes who had starred in Woolrich's south-of-the-border pulpers. An urgent cablegram brings Lombard winging back to New York from Venezuela and the job which he'd left the States to take over on the evening Marcella was murdered. At the end of the tenth chapter, on "The Eighteenth Day Before the Execution," Lombard comes to Henderson's cell and starts probing his friend's wisps of memory from that awful evening. Suddenly Henderson recalls the incident of the cigarette and the blind beggar. The Race Against Time and Death is on.

The next twelve chapters are disconnected and episodic, alternating between scenes of Lombard hunting the dream woman and scenes of Henderson's girlfriend, Carol Richman, on the same quest, each working independently of the other but both reporting unofficially to Burgess. The countdown to execution day continues, and the coloration of these chapters is pure *noir,* with strong overtones of the Destroying Angel motif from *The Bride Wore Black.* Lombard tracks down the former doorman at the Casino Theatre and cross-examines him. Nothing. Carol begins to haunt Anselmo's, getting under the skin of the barman who denied the existence of the phantom lady, quietly terrorizing him by her continuous presence and enigmatic silence until, late one night, on a deserted platform of the Third Avenue El, he tries but fails to push her in the path of an oncoming train. It's one of the most powerful and suspense-wracked scenes in the novel, and the one that lasts longest in readers' memories. Afterward Carol continues to stalk and haunt the man, until in desperation he runs out blindly into the street and is killed by a passing auto. Meanwhile Lombard has picked up the trail of the blind beggar—who turns out not to be blind at all—but no sooner has the man confessed to Lombard that he did indeed see the lady in the pumpkin hat than he breaks his neck in an apparently accidental fall down the stairs of the rancid walk-up where he lives. By this time Carol has shifted her attention to Cliff Milburn, the trap-drummer who had stared so intently at Henderson's date in the theater. She lets Milburn pick her up after a show, accompanies him to a sexually charged impromptu jam session complete with gin and marihuana like the one at the start of Woolrich's 1939 pulper "The Case of the Killer-Diller." Afterward she permits Milburn to take her to his apartment, where she plays on his drug haze and teases him into confessing that he saw the phantom lady too. But before she can get back with Burgess, the musician apparently slits his throat with a razor. Another useless witness. Meanwhile Lombard has wangled a meeting with the tempestuous Mendoza, who under the prodding of his questions has a flash of reverse amnesia and remembers the incident of the two hats. Lombard follows the trail to the studio of Madame Kettisha, the couturier who created Mendoza's sombrero, and from there to a long-ago-fired sewing apprentice who might have been bribed to make an unauthorized duplicate of the pumpkin hat, and from there to the woman who commissioned the copy. Pierrette Douglas admits that much but denies having been Henderson's companion of the evening. Before Lombard can get hold of Burgess to make her tell whom she passed the hat on to, Miss Douglas takes an apparently accidental fall to her death from the window of her high-rise apartment. It is now "The Fifth Day Before the Execution," and Scott Henderson seems more than ever a man marked for doom by a malevolent god.

Seventy-two hours before he is to die, a new lead suddenly opens up: he remembers that the phantom lady tucked into her purse both of their theater programs. Lombard starts working on this clue and, in the last hours before his friend is to be strapped into the chair, what seems to be the invisible woman's flesh and blood incarnation falls into his hands and the race against the executioner is on. At this point Woolrich begins to twist his plot inside out, pulling surprises out of nowhere like rabbits out of hats, and the structure of the novel starts turning cartwheels, going so totally out of whack that it takes almost twenty microscopically printed pages of long-winded explanation before everything is sorted out, at least to Woolrich's satisfaction though hardly to the reader's. In later years Woolrich told Fred Dannay and several others that he had intended never to explain who and what the real phantom lady was but had been forced by Lippincott's editors to concoct a more or less naturalistic account of her.

But even if the novel had been published Woolrich's way it would still have been full of plotting flubs. Here are just a few of the mind-bogglers he would have us accept. One: that Henderson can't recall the first thing about the lady except her hat, even when his life depends on doing better. Two: that the murderer could follow Henderson all evening long, through crowded New York streets and bars and restaurants and theaters, keeping far enough back to avoid being seen while still hovering close enough to note virtually every one out of hundreds of total strangers who might possibly remember that Henderson was with a woman in a pumpkin hat. Three: that within three or four hours in the middle of the night, the murderer could track down all of these people he's never seen before and bribe or scare the lot of them into silence, but didn't even go near the most crucial potential witness, Estela Mendoza. Four: that not one of the countless people who had seen the phantom lady and *not* been reached by the murderer would have come forward during Henderson's trial. Five: that Henderson's lawyer never called Mendoza to testify. Six: that Mendoza can't even remember her near-fistfight with the phantom lady until Lombard prods her months later. And so on and so on. How could Lee Wright have gagged at only one paragraph?

The word for this kind of plot is Eurydicean. We owe the term to James Sandoe (1911–1980), a scholar of crime fiction and for many years the mystery reviewer of the *New York Herald-Tribune*. In his essay "Dagger of the Mind" (*Poetry Magazine*, June 1946; reprinted in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft, 1946), while presenting the first serious discussion of what today we call *noir* literature, Sandoe remarked on Woolrich's carelessness both in general and in this novel.

> But while his skill in contriving variations is staggering, his stories are inclined in retrospect to seem more than a little absurd. To seem, that is, as staged as they are. Woolrich has a facility for catching the reader's attention with a striking situation and then bustling him from shock to shock with a kind of numbing swiftness. The mere facility is apparent only after the last page has been turned and then if one is so unwise as to glance back, the tale itself vanishes into incredibility, very much as Eurydice vanished when Orpheus

> forsook his vow and turned to look at her before she crossed the threshold of Hell.

Sandoe was far from alone in his strictures. In a letter of October 22, 1942, to Blanche Knopf, his publisher's wife, Raymond Chandler mentions that *Phantom Lady*, which he had just read, "has one of those artificial trick plots and is full of small but excessive demands on the Goddess of Chance. . . ." Various reviewers voiced the same complaint.

For Chandler at least, this was not only not a withering criticism, it was almost a compliment. The point of his letter was that "it is the pace that counts, not the logic or the plausibility or the style." Immediately after his apparently negative comment he described *Phantom Lady* as "a swell job of writing, one that gives everything to every character, every scene, and never, like so many of our overrated novelists, just flushes the highlights and then gets scared and runs. I happen to admire this kind of writing very much."

In several respects Chandler's praise is too high. We never get to know any of the four principal characters at all well, and too many of the scenes are almost painful to read, especially when Woolrich thinks he's being funny with Shanty Irish and Mexican Spitfire stereotypes. What makes *Phantom Lady* linger in the mind for years is, first, its uniquely Woolrichian premise and, second and more important, the emotional intensity and stunning *noir* ambience with which it's saturated. The way Henderson comes home and reaches out to turn on the light which suddenly comes on before he's touched the switch. The moment in Chapter 2 when the morgue attendants are carrying out Marcella's body and a whiff of her perfume comes "drifting out of the empty bedroom, seeming to whisper: 'Remember? Remember when I was your love? Remember?'" The cumulative horror of Chapter 4 as Henderson frantically tries and fails to find even one person who will admit having seen the phantom lady. The power of Henderson's statement to the court before being sentenced: "I'm just as afraid of dying as any other man. It isn't easy to die at all, but it's even harder to die for a mistake. I'm not dying for something I've done, but for a mistake. And that's the hardest way to die of all." The suspense and menace and the perfect balance of sympathy between huntress and hunted in the chapters where Carol engages in cat-and-mouse duels with the barman at Anselmo's and the trap-drummer from the Casino Theatre orchestra. The way Lombard's encounter with the terrified hat-maker radiates intimations of another *noir* story entirely, as if the world were full of lonely haunted people whose pain we can glimpse for just a moment. The countdown of chapter titles to death night and the race against the clock, the race which, as Woolrich knew in his bones, each of us ultimately must lose. The brief and unforgettable scene between Henderson and the chaplain in the minutes before the execution party enters the cell, its leitmotif an echo from Woolrich's most powerful piece of short fiction, "Three O'Clock": "It's an awful thing to know the time of your own death."

There's a curious contrast between the last lines of *Phantom Lady* and the last lines of its source, the 1939 pulper "Those Who Kill." As the earlier version ends, Roger Temple, the prototype of Scott Henderson, is hunting for a moral to the harrowing events. "There's probably a lesson in it, some place. Whatever it is, I can't make it out." Billot, the French cop who's the prototype of Burgess, shrugs and says: "Me, I'm a detective, not a philosopher. The only moral is—those who kill, have to die." As the death-intoxicated Woolrich knew all too well, that won't do as a moral at all: those who have been gentle and loving all their lives have to die too. The corresponding reply of Burgess in the novel makes much more sense: "If you've got to have a moral, I give you this: don't ever take strangers to the theater unless you've got a good memory for faces." In other words, forget about moral meanings. Life is a trap.

It was a bleak book but well attuned to an evil time when the American people were becoming accustomed to death and darkness, and its success was phenomenal. The first edition of *Phantom Lady* was published by Lippincott early in August while the serialized version was still appearing in the continuation of *Detective Fiction Weekly*. In September it was included in one of the hardcover triple volumes offered to members of Walter J. Black's newly formed Detective Book Club. On October 31 Woolrich signed a contract with Universal Pictures for the movie rights. In May of 1943 a hardcover reprint edition was published in the short-lived series of Collier Front Page Mysteries, and the following year saw the release of both the movie and the first paperback edition (Pocket Books pb #253, 1944). It was out of print for a decade after the end of the war but was revived twice in the fifties, first as an abridged paperback (Graphic pb #108, 1955) and then as Volume 10 in the prestigious Dell Great Mystery Library series (Dell pb #D207, 1957). At the end of the Eisenhower era it was included in the three-in-one omnibus volume *The Best of William Irish* (Lippincott, 1960) which, as a selection of the Mystery Guild book club, introduced Woolrich to a new generation of readers. In 1967 it turned up in hardcover yet again, in a series of hardcover reprint mysteries published by W.W. Norton, with a lackluster introduction by James Nelson. The most recent paperback (Ballantine pb #30652, 1982) with its marvelous Larry Schwinger cover illustration of the Third Avenue El sequence has brought *Phantom Lady* to the attention of readers who hadn't been born yet when the novel first came out. By all odds it ranks with *The Bride Wore Black* as the most durable of the Woolrich novels.

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In the later months of 1942 four more Woolrich tales appeared in various pulps. The shortest and simplest of the quartet was "Implacable Bequest" (*Detective Tales*, September 1942), in which a man on the run in an automobile is stopped by two other fugitives who kill him and take over his money, car, identity—and the murder he was fleeing from. It's the standard James M. Cain situation of getting away with your own murder and getting fried for someone else's, but the vivid touches make it palatable. Woolrich submitted this one as "Bequest," the title under which it was later reprinted.

"Orphan Ice" (*Dime Detective*, September 1942), submitted as "The Case of the Orphaned Diamond," could easily have been one of those Smart Cop Calls It Murder exercises, but the suspense and *noir* ambience lift it way above routine level. The place is a nameless Midwest city and, most unusual for Woolrich, the war is on. Three jewel thieves trap a widowed refugee in her apartment and, no doubt remembering the 1940 "Post-Mortem," throw her into a bathtub full of water and drop a radio in on top of her so that her death will look accidental. They steal a $50,000 diamond from her bedroom, and next day one of them pretends to have found it on the street and turns it in to the police, knowing that the jewel will legally belong to him and his partners in six months if no one claims it. Cooper, the unobtrusive smart cop of the tale, sees through the scheme and rigs a somewhat slapdash trap with touches borrowed from another 1940 pulper, "The Red Tide." It's a tautly readable story if you don't gag at two or three absurdities.

In case you were wondering what Woolrich might do with a Perry Mason courtroom whodunit plot, the answer is in "The Hopeless Defense of Mrs. Dellford" (*Dime Detective*, December 1942): he'd screw it up beyond belief. Big-city criminal lawyer Lost Cause Larry Brett steps off a train in the village of New Cordoba to visit the only prisoner in the jailhouse, beautiful Lee Dellford, whom he had loved years before when she was a New York showgirl, and who is now about to go on trial for murder. "You look just like the night I first saw you, a kid of sixteen, walking down those stairs on the New Amsterdam stage, holding a papier-mâché bird of paradise on your wrist. . . . I told you you should have married me, not him." A flashback tells us that the Dellfords' lecherous next-door neighbor Jeff Rogers had threatened to let the police know that Lee's husband was a wanted fugitive unless she slept with him, that Lee had threatened to kill Rogers if he did betray her husband, and that Gregg Dellford had subsequently died out of town, in a police shootout. We also learn that the next day Rogers was found hanging out an open window of his house, shot to death, at almost the same instant that Lee was seen leaning out the opposite window of her own house with a smoking pistol in her hand. The courtroom scenes are preposterous: the prosecutor gets to call Lee to testify against herself, Brett doesn't bother to cross-examine a single state's witness, and when it's time to present his defense he moves the trial to the Dellford backyard and puts on the genre's dumbest Re-enactment of the Crime charade, which culminates in a pop-up confession from the real murderer. At the fadeout our legal eagle reveals that he had faked most of his "demonstration" in order to trick the person he "knew" to be guilty into blurting out the truth. After all, he says, isn't the practice of law mostly showmanship? "What's that old saying? The end justifies the means." Haven't we read that line in Woolrich before? A leaden-footed mess.

On a much higher level is "Havana Night" (*Flynn's Detective Magazine*, December 1942), which takes place between dusk and dawn in a forties Cuba turned city of nightmare. Scott, the narrator, has just gotten off the boat in company with his woman, the runaway wife of a Miami gangster. Within a few hours she is stabbed to death in a crowded bar and Scott is framed for her murder. He bolts from the police and finds shelter with La Media Noche, a Cuban prostitute with a loving heart, who tries to help him avenge his lover's death. Most of this novelette pulsates with *noir* coloration but the climax comes straight out of Woolrich's pulp whizbangs, complete with opium dens, secret passages and sinister "Chinks." Like 1941's "Of Time and Murder," it seems to have been tailor-made for expansion to novel length, and two years later it became the basis for *The Black Path of Fear.*

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1942 was a year of pain for millions of Americans but financially at least it was a good year for Woolrich, indeed his best since he'd taken up suspense fiction. He made a little over $2,000 from the pulps, a little over $2,600 from novels, and almost $5,200 from the sale of movie rights to *Black Alibi* and *Phantom Lady*, for a grand total of just under $10,000. By forties standards that was a small fortune. It's unlikely that he enjoyed a penny of it.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

In October of 1942, when he praised *Phantom Lady* in a letter to Blanche Knopf, Raymond Chandler had had no idea who "William Irish" was. Within the next three months or so, he found out. Writing to Blanche's husband and his own publisher, Alfred Knopf, on February 8, 1943, Chandler set down his perceptions of Woolrich and his work:

> William Irish is a man named Cornell Woolrich, an author under his own name, and one of the oldest hands there are at the pulp detective business. He is known in the trade as an idea writer, liking the tour de force, and not much of a character man. I think his stuff is very readable, but leaves no warmth behind it.

A strange paragraph indeed! Not only was Chandler unaware that Woolrich's debut in the crime pulps had come almost a year after Chandler's own, but he never mentioned suspense or emotional torment or the complex evocative skills we know today as *noir*. It's as if all Woolrich had ever written were Bizarre Murder Method exercises. The comments aren't totally off the mark but they do make one wonder how much of Woolrich besides *Phantom Lady* Chandler had actually read.

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Readers during the first five months of 1943 were offered a huge choice of Woolrich material: a new novel that was among his finest, the first of his short story collections, plus seven new tales in the pulps. Only two of the seven rank with his best, but almost all of them are enhanced by the strong suspense and *noir* touches that by now were second nature to him.

"The Body in Grant's Tomb" (*Dime Detective*, January 1943) belongs both in the New York Landmarks series and in the sporadic series of Woolrich stories narrated by feisty middle-aged women. On a visit to her nephew Howie in the big city, spinsterish Agatha Appleby goes to a vividly described Grant's Tomb and, more or less in line with the old joke, finds a corpse on the premises other than that of the General. In the shock of discovering a young woman's body Agatha sets down her own handbag and picks up the murder victim's, a mistake which eventually convinces her that this is a golden opportunity for her to have the adventure of her life playing amateur detective and trying to solve the crime ahead of the police. The plot soon degenerates into routine pulp stuff about sinister nightclub owners and underworld double-crosses, but the sequence where Agatha prowls the apartment where the dead woman had lived a life of fear and then finds that the killers are there too is a gem of suspenseful *noir*.

"If the Shoe Fits" (*Dime Detective*, March 1943) is another blend of standard pulp shoot-'em-up material and genuine *noir*, but the plotting represents Woolrich at his sloppiest. It's wartime, and private investigator Tom Nye is driving across a suspension bridge one Sunday evening on his way home when he sees a man about to jump from the parapet. He leaps out of the car, saves the man's life, berates him as a yellowbelly for attempting suicide, then listens to the man's story. The outlines of that story are straight out of *The Black Curtain*: the stranger has come to after a second accidental blow on the head and discovered that he'd been living an amnesiac second life for the past several months. Nye instantly drops whatever else he's been doing with himself and tries to help the man find his lost identity. In the night-bound hours they come upon a waterfront house with which the stranger seems intimately familiar (this is never explained), and in an upstairs closet of the house they find a dead man wearing two left shoes. One of the corresponding right shoes is also in the closet—which raises the question why the dead man didn't put that shoe on his right foot, which is never explained either—but the other right shoe is missing. Any other P.I. in fiction would have called the police. Nye doesn't consider such a course for a moment. Instead he and his client spend the rest of the night sleeping in the dead man's bed, with his body just a few feet away, then set off on the trail of the missing footgear. Along the way unseen bad guys make two loud and bullet-riddled attempts to kill them but apparently no one sees or hears these six-gun symphonies or reports them to the cops. And so on and so on till the pulpy climax. The few effective *noir* touches in this slapdash potboiler don't help much.

"Mind Over Murder" (*Dime Detective*, May 1943), which Woolrich submitted as "Murderess," is by far his best story published that year and one of his most terrifying evocations of the demonic force of love. In a tropical island dependency of the United States, two elegant young women are sipping tea in a fashionable restaurant. Marie Stewart casually suggests to her friend Pauline Baron that the best way for Pauline to free herself from the trap of a marriage gone cold is to find the thing her husband fears most in the world and use that fear to kill him without leaving a trace. The only thing Donald Baron fears is snakes. Pauline finds an old native crone, buys from her a harmless but repulsive-looking serpent, then sets the stage so that Donald and the snake will be locked together in a dark closet reminiscent of the death closet in *The Bride Wore Black*. The suspense rises to fever pitch as the night goes on, with one twist following another until the grotesquely surprising climax with its revelation of perverted sadistic love by a woman who was willing to drive her lover into gibbering madness in order to have him for herself. The story suffers from the Eurydice syndrome—a visit to a divorce lawyer would have aborted the plot on page one, and the precise timing of Marie's crucial phone call is a clear case of what Chandler called God sitting in a character's lap—but it generates so much stomach-churning fright that thinking about plot flaws is next to impossible.

Flynn's Detective Fiction Magazine, as the continuation of *Detective Fiction Weekly* was called in 1943, weighed in with a pair of Woolrich stories in the early months of the year. "The Death Stone" (*Flynn's Detective Fiction*, February 1943), better known under its reprint title "The Earring," is narrated in first person by another in Woolrich's gallery of female protagonists. The lovely and socially prominent Mrs. James Shaw pays off the ex-boyfriend who's been blackmailing her with five-year-old love letters rather than risk their being mailed to her wealthy stockbroker husband. Returning home from the payoff, she finds she's missing one of her earrings, goes back to her ex-boyfriend's apartment to retrieve it before he can use it to blackmail her again, and discovers his body lying on the floor and a gunman skulking in his bedroom. Her frantic efforts to keep free of her husband's suspicions and the gunman's bullets generate some anguished suspense, but there are so many ridiculous elements in the plot—would you believe for example that someone can be tried for murder with neither side calling as a witness the one person who saw the defendant at the crime scene?—that the novelette's weaknesses run neck and neck with its strengths.

Still it was worlds superior to "The Death Diary" (*Flynn's Detective Fiction*, April 1943), a forgettable quickie which Woolrich threw together by reworking Part Three of *The Black Curtain* into a tale told via a long string of entries in the private journal of the male conspirator in Harry Diedrich's murder. The names of the characters are changed, but the story line is lifted from *Curtain* even in tiny details, only from the perspective of the real killer rather than that of the frame-up victim. At best it's a pointless exercise but the story soon plummets into disaster. Until the last few pages of his journal, the diarist goes to stupefying lengths to conceal the fact that he's in a partnership to commit a murder. Why would he lie so elaborately in a document meant for his eyes only, and then reveal the truth to us? When Woolrich blew an idea he blew it to hell and gone. For the record, his original title for this piece of dreck was "Death Keeps a Diary" and he was paid $192 for it.

Woolrich's only 1943 story in *Black Mask* was "If the Dead Could Talk" (*Black Mask*, February 1943), which is unique in the crime genre in that all but its first and last few paragraphs are narrated in first person by a dead man. Joe Crosby is part of a daredevil trapeze act consisting of himself, Tommy Sloan, who's been his best friend since childhood, and Natalie, whom both men love but who loves only Tommy in return. On the day Natalie and Tommy marry, Joe can stand it no longer, he *must* kill Tommy before their wedding night; and Woolrich makes us feel in our hearts both his pain and his madness. The three are giving a performance that afternoon. Just before the death-defying leap that is their specialty, Joe greases his wrists so that Tommy, whom he's supposed to catch in mid-air while dangling upside down from a trapeze closer to the ground, will plunge to his death. Since the climax is narrated from Joe's limited perspective, we can't be sure what happens next. Either Tommy accidentally falls from his high perch or Natalie pushes him, but in any event he saves his life by hanging on to a guy rope all the way down, burning all the skin off his hand in the process. At this point Natalie signals from her trapeze for the show to go on and that she'll do the leap in Tommy's place. Again we can't know the real meaning of this—is she just doing what show people are supposed to do, or is she aware of the situation and forcing Joe to choose between killing her or killing himself?—and Joe can't know either. He chooses to drop from his perch to his own death. That is what we would know if the dead could talk: very little indeed. It's one of the most ambitious and most carefully executed of all the Woolrich pulpers of the forties.

Baffling Detective Mysteries is the purest commercial failure the crime pulps ever produced, literally a one-issue title, a magazine that appeared and vanished almost overnight. What better home for a Woolrich story? "The Death Rose" (*Baffling Detective Mysteries*, March 1943) is a suspenseful, structurally cockeyed spinoff from the classic "Dime a Dance" situation of the young woman who helps her plainclothesman boyfriend by staking herself out as bait to trap a psychotic serial killer of women. This time the narrative is in third person and the protagonist is not a gutsy taxi dancer but a wealthy debutante, Ginny Trowbridge. The setting is New York during World War II, and Ginny's homicide squad boyfriend faces demotion if he doesn't track down the madman who's been strangling tall dark-haired young women during practice blackouts and leaving a white rosebud next to each of his victims. Without letting her boyfriend know what she's up to, Ginny starts sneaking out at night to dance halls, hoping the killer will pick her up. The suspense rises from her encounters with several different men, each of whom happens by Woolrich Coincidence to match the strangler's psychological profile just about perfectly, so that we're kept on the edge of our seats but only by the most ridiculous plot devices. In Woolrich that's a flaw that goes with the territory.

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The next Cornell Woolrich book and the next William Irish book came out almost simultaneously, in February of 1943, and except for the fear that they might compete with one another for readers' attention if published under the same byline, there seems no reason for the use of a different name on each. After the break with Lee Wright and the creation of the Irish pseudonym with Whit Burnett for Lippincott, Woolrich continued to write more full-length fiction than a single publisher cared to release. Therefore he took his own name and the acclaimed Black Series to the house of Doubleday, which had long been a quantity publisher of mysteries under its Crime Club imprint. The first of his two novels issued by that firm was *The Black Angel*, one of the strongest, strangest and most wrenching of all his book-length works and the only one narrated throughout in first person as by a woman. Superficially it's a conventional suspenser of the Female Menaced brand, but once we crack its thin surface we are in the perverse and jolting nightworld that is Woolrich's private domain, and locked inside the mind and heart of one of his most twisted people.

The ties between *The Black Angel* and his two best-known previous books are easily perceived. In a sense, it's a replay of *Phantom Lady* and the race against the clock to save the innocent man convicted of murder, only this time it's the man's girlfriend who's been killed and his wife who's risking her life to save him from the chair. In another sense it's a replay of *The Bride Wore Black* and the series of disconnected episodes with a tormented psychotic woman entering the lives of various men and devastating each in a different way. But the roots of this novel go much deeper than that into Woolrich's past as both a writer and a man.

The Black Angel's basic story line stems from the 1932 *Manhattan Love Song*, whose male narrator, Wade, was on the brink of leaving his wife and going away with the mysterious and enigmatic Bernice Pascal when Bernice was murdered and Wade wrongly convicted of the crime. As we've seen, Woolrich had already reworked this situation in 1935's "Murder in Wax" and again, with a brother–sister relationship instead of one between husband and wife, in 1937's "Face Work," better known as "Angel Face." Elements from all three works as well as from *The Bride Wore Black* and *Phantom Lady* loom large in *The Black Angel.*

> He always called me "Angel Face." That was his name for me when we were by ourselves. That was a special thing, from him to me. He'd bring his face down close to mine and say it low. He'd say he wondered where I'd got it, that angel face. And things like that your husband says to you.
>
> Then all at once it stopped. . . .

The reason it's stopped is that he, the husband, Kirk Murray, has gotten involved with another woman, nightclub entertainer Mia Mercer. A few hours after finding Kirk's packed suitcase hidden in a closet, and knowing for sure what until now she had only feared—namely that he's about to go away with his new love—Alberta French Murray, the black angel of the title, forces herself to go to Mia and beg for her man back. She finds the entrance door of Mia's lavish Sutton Place apartment unlocked and the woman herself on the bedroom floor, smothered to death with a pillow. At almost the same moment she discovers the body, Mia's phone rings, and Alberta in a panic lifts the receiver to shut off the sound and hears Kirk's voice on the other end, asking for Mia, and hangs up without a word. Convinced that Kirk is innocent and frantic to protect him, Alberta steals Mia's address book from the apartment, and on the way out notices and also takes with her a match folder, monogrammed with an M, which she finds wedged in the seam of the entrance door, apparently by the real murderer, who visited Mia openly once and then sneaked back to kill her. What Alberta doesn't bother to do is to report the murder to the police; indeed she doesn't even think to call Kirk at his office and tell him Mia's dead until it's too late and he's on his way there. As night's shadows fall, Kirk comes home to her, handcuffed to a cynical cop named Flood and arrested for Mia's murder. We never learn who did report the crime, and from the few details Woolrich gives us, the case against Kirk seems feeble at best, but a few pages later he's already awaiting execution. "I'm only twenty-two," Alberta says, "and yet they're going to make me a widow in less than three months." Wisely Woolrich spares us a trial scene, telling us only that Alberta didn't testify and was told to sit far back in the courtroom, unrecognizable behind a veil. This becomes important in light of what happens later.

After Kirk is in the death house, and Alberta is going through his belongings which the police have returned to her, she discovers that the monogrammed match folder she took from Mia's apartment did not belong to Mia herself. Therefore, she concludes at once, it must have belonged to the real murderer. Therefore, she concludes at once, the real murderer must be one of the four names on the M page of Mia's address book. As Woolrich Luck would have it, she has thrown away the match folder without having mentioned it to a soul but has kept the book of addresses and phone numbers. She goes to Flood, who is implausibly impressed by her story. But instead of sending out underlings to check whether any of the four M's uses monogrammed match folders of the sort Alberta has described, as any sensible cop would do in fiction or the real world, Flood merely agrees to backstop her own crazy and time-intensive plan: to enter the life of each M in turn and try to pin the murder on him.

The first M, listed just as "Marty," turns out to be Martin Blair, a hopeless alcoholic lurching from one saloon to another in the living cemetery of the Bowery, in "the lowest depths of all, this side the grave. There was nothing beyond this, nothing further. Nothing came after it—only death, the river." Blair haunts the cheapest dives, always buying two shots of smoke, one for himself and one for someone unseen, "always talking to a dame that isn't there." The other Bowery bums call him Heartbreak. When Alberta finds him in a bar, the roomful of derelicts suddenly falls silent, each man remembering someone from his past, "long ago, far away, come back to mind again for a moment, before the memory darkened again and went out—forever. It was life's last afterglow glancing off the faces of the dead. . . ." She inserts herself into Marty's wretched life, buys him drinks, gets him a cheap hotel room with a real bed, feeds him, brings him back into the world of the living just enough to open him up, entice him to talk. When he does, she learns that he was Mia Mercer's husband, and that he'd been haunting her from the darkness ever since she had dumped him. "I just watched her windows from across the street in the shadows, in the rain and in the snow—." Convinced that Marty is the killer and ready to do anything that will draw a damaging admission out of him, Alberta first tells him that she saw him smother Mia, hoping that he'll try to kill her too, and when that doesn't work, she makes him think that she killed Mia herself and tempts him to prove his love for Mia by avenging her. The episode ends with Marty's suicide. Does *l'ange noir* blame herself? "No, I was kind to him. I gave him something to die for. That was more than he had before. It is better to die for something than to live for nothing." Long before this climax we are convinced that this woman is sick to the point of psychosis, very much like Julie in *The Bride Wore Black* and for very similar reasons, although this time we are not objective observers but trapped inside the narrator's warped soul, knowing everything she knows, feeling everything she feels, her terror and desperation and murderous obsession growing like a cancer within. That is what *The Black Angel* is about, not the race against the clock—there's hardly a mention of the countdown to the day of Kirk Murray's execution—but the divided reaction, the evocation of the emotional world of a protagonist whom we must view with both empathy and horror.

The next M in Mia's book is named Mordaunt and turns out to be a foul-smelling doctor with a sideline of pushing narcotics. The street where he lives has no name but we can call it Noir Street.

> Oh, it was so dark along this street. Just that hooded, half-dimmed light on the other side, too far behind me to do any good any more. Looking downward into the little pool of its own reflection, like a discreetly retiring eye refusing to see what happened to me. And that little cross of punctured green pin points down the other way at the corner below, like a spark floating a little above the curb, that sometimes turned red and then came back to green again. A car passed once in a while, but even that was nothing, just a swift black shape hastening along on the black tide with a glint of silver at its prow.

Alberta pays a visit to Dr. Mordaunt, claiming that Mia told her all about him, and within forty-eight hours is taken into his dope-selling operation as a delivery person. At first we're supposed to believe that she's naive beyond words and has no idea what she's doing, but as she makes her rounds through the nightscape—a cheap cafeteria, a seedy bar, a dance hall, a decaying movie palace, all peopled by living ghosts engaged in the "never-ending, never-succeeding attempt to hold pain, despair, death at bay for a little while"—it's crystal clear that she knows exactly what she has become. "I'd go ahead doing even this for you, Kirk," she says to her own unseen love. "I can't go back [to Mordaunt] unless I do." And without going back to him she has no hope of saddling him with Mia's murder. This episode is as full of suspense and anguish as anything in the Woolrich canon, but Mordaunt never rises above the pulp monster level, and if any part of

The Black Angel can be called more or less conventional Woman Menaced stuff, it's the final scenes of this chapter, from which Alberta incredibly emerges with a whole skin, proof that Mordaunt isn't the man she's after, and no criminal charges against herself.

M Number Three turns out to be Ladd Mason, a wealthy young bon vivant whose seemingly carefree world is Alberta's next target. Her object this time is to make her victim fall in love with her, and in very short order she succeeds. She takes an apartment, patiently reels him in, turns white with fright on the night when he says he wants to call her Angel Face, and eventually, at his sister's birthday party, discovers that Mason is the owner of the M-monogrammed match folder and therefore must be Mia's killer. On the strength of her word alone, Flood sets up a hidden dictaphone device in her apartment to preserve any damaging admission she might betray Mason into letting slip. The hooked man falls deeper and deeper in love with his angel, but it's a strange kind of love, the only kind that seems to exist in the world of this novel, sexless and featureless and tinged with overtones of religion including references to symbolic "christening" and to "driving nails into a cross." Late one night in her apartment, while the dictaphone is on, Alberta asks Mason to tell her of the previous women in his life. He begins by describing a girl named Patsy who lived on Columbus Avenue right next to the El and who wound up in prison for stealing a fur wrap to wear at one of his rich friends' parties. This incident, which has no plot relevance whatsoever, comes straight out of Woolrich's own young manhood as he was to portray it about twenty years later in *Blues of a Lifetime*: he himself is Ladd Mason, and Patsy is Vera Gaffney, his first love. Then Mason starts talking about Mia Mercer, admits that he hated her, claims that in some mysterious way she had poisoned his sister's relationship with the only man in her life, even confesses that he visited Mia's apartment on the day of her death, but insists that he had come too late and found her body on the floor. Alberta's reaction to his story is not despair but unspeakable joy. "He didn't do it; he didn't do it; he didn't do it!" As if we hadn't guessed already, she's fallen as madly in love with Mason as he has with her. She leaves him there asleep in her apartment, with just a brief note—"Good-by, my dear. You never knew me. I never knew you."—and goes on to her fourth quest and her last hope of saving her other love's life.

The last M from Mia's address book is McKee, who turns out to be a gambler-gangster-nightclub owner of a sort familiar from Woolrich's pulpers. Alberta seeks entree into his world by auditioning for a spot in the club's chorus line but gets very lucky when the angelic quality that had pierced Ladd Mason also captivates McKee. Once again the relationship is sexless and suffused with religion, with Alberta being described as "like a vision up above the altar of a church," as being "worshiped" by the supposedly hardboiled McKee, and there's even a reference to "a sort of chalice of salvation." Quickly engaged to the gambler and installed albeit virginally in his Central Park West penthouse, Alberta soon induces him to give her the combination to his apartment safe and takes the earliest opportunity to open it and hunt for evidence of his connection with Mia Mercer. What she finds is insignificant to her quest, but she's caught literally with her fingers in the till by McKee's goons. The revelation of her treachery shatters this latest man in her life. "Love is like an eggshell; it can never be put together again." He orders his gunmen to take her out and kill her. As the executioners' car weaves through Central Park in the dead of night, she is saved from execution by the return of Ladd Mason into the story. But just when we think the book is finished, Woolrich throws in new plot twists by the handful, and the result is death for one of the men Alberta loved and life for the other, but no peace for her and nothing but a dead man in her dreams.

> This morning he was leaving me again, drawing away slowly, moving softly backward out of the room. . . . He was near the door now, that recurrent door that I could never get by, no matter how I ached and strained, that I could never pass through myself. His face was turned to look back at me. Now he was drawing the door slowly closed after himself. Now he would be gone again.
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> . . . . "Don't go! Come back a minute!" The door was all but closed now. I could still see just the outline of his face, slowly dimming behind it. My arms strained out in helpless appeal, while I kept calling after him, more loudly, more heartbrokenly with every breath, "Don't leave me behind! Don't leave me behind!"

That word "heartbrokenly" with its resurrection of the memory of Marty Blair is the key to the novel's climax: Alberta ends up like her first victim, torn by love for one who is dead, shattered inside as she had shattered others, executioner and victim in one flesh like so many who dwell in the nightmare world of *noir.*

According to Fred Dannay, Woolrich's "driving narrative power . . . carries readers on the crest of a tidal wave, and they are equally oblivious of the long arm of coincidence and the long arm of incredibility" when immersed in his fiction even though there "might be a hole in the plot structure that would destroy an ordinary story." That description fits *The Black Angel* like a glove. Many of its technical gaffes we've seen already, but another which we didn't stop to examine is worth a moment's thought. In his heavily theoretical book *The Poetics of Prose* (1977) the Eastern European literary critic

Tzvetan Todorov points out a curious lapse that no commentator on *The Black Angel* seems to have noticed before him. In the first several chapters, he says, the unquestioned even if illogical premise is that once Alberta finds the owner of the monogrammed match folder she will have found Mia's killer. Then she learns that the M of the match folder is Ladd Mason, but he accounts for his connection with Mia in a way that satisfies Alberta of his innocence. Logically she has now lost every reason for believing that one of the M's in Mia's address book is her murderer: the real killer might be listed on a different page or might not be in the book at all. What does Alberta do next? She goes after McKee, the next M in the book! Todorov attributes the blunder to Woolrich's desire to diddle with our expectation that the last man in the series of episodes must be the murderer. There's some truth in that theory, but it seems to me that Todorov has missed much of the point. *In Woolrich logic doesn't exist. In Woolrich at his most powerful, a hole in the continuity stands for a hole in the universe.*

Of all Woolrich's novels *The Black Angel* is the most emotionally intense. The plot won't stand critical reflection for a split second, but by keeping us locked within his protagonist's love-wracked subjectivity, keeping us divided against ourselves, at once empathizing with her and shuddering at what she does to herself and others in the holy name of love, he comes very near to making us close down our minds and just *feel.* Love is the novel's mainspring, but it's light-years removed from the sweetly reassuring force one usually finds in mysteries with a female lead; and if we recall Lee Wright's description of the "absolute idiot adoration . . . and a sense of awe" with which he regarded her—and which she also saw, along with an element of hate, in his relationship with his mother—we may well have found the biographical roots of this memorable and maniacal love story.

As was to be expected with a book this unorthodox, reviewers' reactions were mixed. Isaac Anderson in the *New York Times* was favorable but superficial: "In these episodes the earnest seeker after thrills will find enough and to spare." *The Saturday Review of Literature* wasn't much more perceptive, describing the novel as "well packed with action and burling with emotion." The *New York Herald-Tribune*'s Will Cuppy, who usually tried to make his comments funny rather than insightful, came closer to the mark when he said: "This stands up well beside Mr. Woolrich's other adventures in stark unreality." No one seemed to catch on that our narrator and viewpoint character was a madwoman totally lacking in moral authority.

Whether contemporary readers did any better is unclear, but the book certainly was read. The first mass-market edition was in a rare series of digest-sized paperbacks (Avon Murder Mystery Monthly #27, 1944), and a softcover of conventional dimensions soon followed (Avon pb #96, 1946). The fifties saw two more digest-sized paper editions (Jonathan Press pb #J51, 1951; Bestseller Mystery #B206, 1957, abridged), and another standard-sized softcover came out in the sixties on the heels of Woolrich's death (Ace pb #06505, 1969). The most recent paperback (Ballantine pb #30664, 1982) features a Larry Schwinger cover illustration which for once fails to do justice to its subject.

The Black Angel has also been a favorite of other media. Within less than fifteen years it was adapted into a thirty-minute radio play, a short-story tie-in with the radio drama, an excellent movie, two separate and distinct sixty-minute radio plays, and an hour-long live TV drama. All of these will be considered in their appropriate places. Woolrich's work diary even indicates that at one time he thought or was approached about turning the novel into an opera libretto, to be titled "The Tape-Recording Angel." Certainly the book has emotion enough for several operas.

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Later in the same month *The Black Angel* was published by Doubleday, Lippincott, without benefit of the Story Press imprint released the second William Irish title and the first in a long line of Woolrich short fiction volumes, *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*, which consisted of five lengthy novelettes, four of them pulp classics. For readers who eschewed the luridly covered pulps it must have been an overpowering experience to encounter for the first time the title story and "Three O'Clock," both from 1938, and "Nightmare," which was the new name for 1941's "And So to Death," and "Papa Benjamin," which was the new name for 1935's "Dark Melody of Madness." Those who *had* read some or all of these in the magazines, where they'd been published under Woolrich's own byline, must instantly have cracked the mystery, if ever there was one, about the identity of William Irish.

The second and by far the longest novelette in the collection, "Last Night," was billed at least by negative implication as a brand-new work, but in fact it was an expansion of Woolrich's 1940 pulper "The Red Tide" to almost triple its original length. The basic story line remains that of an oscillation thriller with annihilation overtones, in which circumstances make Jacqueline Blaine ever more certain that her shifty husband Gil has murdered their mysteriously vanished house guest Homer Burroughs and stolen the fat bankroll he implausibly brought to the Blaines' weekend party with him. In "The Red Tide" Woolrich never told us where the events were taking place or what Jackie and Gil did for a living, but in "Last Night" he makes them the owners of a failing Hudson Valley dude ranch, opening a door for the introduction of several new characters to serve along with Gil as suspects. Most of these newcomers are stick figures—Burroughs' male secretary, a predatory divorcée, a fugitive gangster from the thirties—but Bud Arden, the alcoholic ex-writer whose hopes of creating great literature died long ago, is a revealing Woolrich self-portrait. A great deal of the additional wordage of "Last Night" is devoted to Jackie and Gil and the slow death and tentative resurrection of their marriage, which Woolrich evokes with consummate intensity. Gil is a high-strung loner with a vicious streak, incapable of opening up emotionally, who lies to his wife again and again yet keeps ordering her to believe in and obey him, while Jackie is a masochistic fool who's ready to accept the consequences of whatever Gil has done, including murder, as long as he doesn't act like a yellowbelly. These two characters are strange enough to keep a psychiatrist busy for months. On a technical level, as if to demonstrate how flexible the oscillation story line can be, Woolrich flipflops so that the climax of "Last Night" is the exact opposite of that in "The Red Tide" while the plot remains all but identical. The result is an abundance of extremely hard-to-swallow lumps in the continuity—like the notion that the police can't arrest a murder suspect until what Woolrich calls the *corpus delictus* has been found, or the fact that no one smells the body rotting away in the rumbleseat during the several days the story takes to unfold—but the emotional feverishness and near magical word power keep us from gagging anywhere near as often as we would if another writer were feeding us this glop.

Relatively few major newspapers and magazines reviewed the collection, but the *New York Times* gave it more than triple the space given *The Black Angel*, and William DuBois' remarks capture both the sublime and the ridiculous sides of the Woolrich world. "Any one of these stories can be recommended without reservation, if you enjoy raising goose-pimples after midnight. Of course, the plot structure in all of them is crooked as a dog's hind leg. . . . But it hardly matters . . . once you have surrendered to their hypnotic spell." Although *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* has never been reprinted intact except for a wartime Armed Services Edition paperback intended for the fighting man's knapsack, three of its component parts—"Three O'Clock," "Nightmare" and "Papa Benjamin"—have been revived again and again in later anthologies and collections. For some unfathomable reason reprinters have neglected the title story, which so perfectly mirrors the bleak Woolrich universe.

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If *noir* overshadowed pulp in the Woolrich novels, many of his wartime magazine tales remained as pulpy as ever, including the three that were published that summer. "Come Witness My Murder!" (*Flynn's Detective Fiction*, August 1943) starts out unpromisingly as demon newshawk Bill Tiffany's colleagues pull a practical joke on him with a phony tip that the much hated town banker has been found murdered in his hunting lodge. In a scene full of vivid eerie beauty, Tiffany crosses a frozen lake on sled and ice skates, heading for the scene of the fake crime. Reaching the lodge, he discovers that the crime *we* know to be a hoax is both real and in progress. The centerpiece of the story is a magnificent outdoor chase sequence, but the idiocy of the plot becomes overpowering in the final scenes where one ridiculous surprise after another is thrown at us. Woolrich submitted this farrago as "Exclusive" and was paid $200 for first serial rights.

"Leg Man" (*Dime Detective*, August 1943), published the same month, is another Demon Newshawk whizbang, light on action but crackling with insult humor of Woolrich's unique variety. Eager-beaver reporter Clint Burgess is sent out to cover a routine barroom killing. Mike Oliver has been found dead on the floor of his own tavern, with a 20¢ sale showing on the cash register and two glasses on the bar, one having no fingerprints at all and the other loaded with the prints of Chuck Hastings, who had had a fight with Oliver a month before. Hastings is arrested and sweated but insists he's innocent, and One Little Detail at the crime scene convinces Burgess that the man has been framed. In his search for the real killer he sets himself up to be kidnapped by the bad guys and menaced in the usual pulp fashion before the fadeout. As a detective story this is a hopelessly inept and unfair effort, with crucial facts kept concealed from us and the time sequence fouled up *ad nauseam*, but there are a few vividly gruesome touches like the description of the morgue ambulance "with a stretcher partly protruding from it like an avaricious tongue."

His last new story of the year, submitted as "Death R.F.D." and published as "Death on Delivery" (*Dime Detective*, September 1943), features another of his rural settings and another of his "Accident? Suicide? No, it was murder!" variations. The detective this time is country postman Fred Emmons, who stops off at the Mallory farm one morning to deliver a package and finds old Ben Mallory hanging from an attic rafter. Mallory's daughter is missing, as is all the money from the old man's homemade safe, as are the two men from the city who'd been boarding at the farm. Woolrich manages to spread a tissue-thin plot over a huge number of words, but for the most part it's a routine exercise. He recycled the murder-disguised-as-suicide-by-hanging gimmick two years later in "Four Bars of Yankee Doodle," the novelette which he later expanded into the 1951 *Strangler's Serenade*.

The same month "Death on Delivery" came out, Fred Dannay reprinted in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* for September 1943 another of Woolrich's pulp classics, the 1938 "After-Dinner Story," which Woolrich himself and Whit Burnett were also to choose a year later to lead off the next William Irish collection. In November of the same year, editor A.L. Furman became the first person to include a Woolrich tale in a hardcover anthology when he used "If the Dead Could Talk" in *The Mystery Companion* (Gold Label, 1943). And back in March the golden door of network radio had opened for Woolrich when CBS began airing adaptations of his stories (some of them possibly scripted by Woolrich himself) on its memorable series *Suspense*.

According to his financial records, 1943 was his second-best year to date. He had earned $1,245 from short fiction, just over $6,200 from novels, almost $1,300 from radio, for a total of almost $8,750. One might think that with all the money he'd made and all that he'd accomplished—a major novel, his first story collection, several new magazine tales, the release of RKO's *The Leopard Man* based on *Black Alibi*, the radio success—he would have been a contented man as 1943 drew to a close. Far from it. In a letter he wrote to Furman for *The Mystery Companion*, here is how he described his life:

> I was born in New York City in 1906. Attended Columbia University. First published novel was *Cover Charge* (1926) while still at Columbia. . . .
>
> I have never had any other job or occupation than a writer, in fact I was already writing professionally before I graduated, so you can see that very little has happened to me.
>
> This makes for a very uneventful life, with nothing to report. One day is exactly like another.

Shaving three years off his age as usual, pretending he was under twenty-one when he first began to sell, falsely hinting that he'd graduated from college, these are hardly the acts of a secure or contented man. But if we read between the spaces of his words, we can feel the emptiness of his life as he turned forty, his resignation to the treadmill of his destiny, the total lack of any sense of self-worth. This is how the supreme artist of suspense fiction summed himself up at the midpoint of his most creative years.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

He had just turned forty (though he wouldn't admit it) and had risen from pulpster to top-ranked suspense novelist in a little more than three years. During the war it seemed that everywhere one turned in the mystery field, Woolrich was there, omnipresent as the awareness of death. Two new novels and a new story collection in hardcover; paperback editions of *Phantom Lady* and *The Black Angel*; two stories reprinted in mystery anthologies, two in general fiction anthologies, and a fifth in *EQMM*; eight more tales adapted for radio's *Molle Mystery Theater* and *Suspense*; two new movies in release based on his work (the classic *Phantom Lady*, which opened Hollywood's big doors to him, and the excellent low-budget thriller *The Mark of the Whistler*); all this within the single year 1944!

His life of course remained as bleak as ever. In his autobiographical manuscript there's a long reflection on loneliness:

> I was born to be solitary, and I liked it that way. Some are, and some do. And all the many times, probably the hundreds of times, I've sat alone at a table somewhere, a drink out in front of me, during the late hours, the closing hours, holding

> my face against my hand and staring pensively before me because I had no one to go home to and nowhere to go home to, it was just a sentimental "act" . . . a melancholy pose for my own benefit, and deep down inside I knew that I was lying to myself, and that I wouldn't have had it otherwise, and that if someone had been waiting somewhere for me with open arms at that very moment, I would have turned and run in the opposite direction as fast as I could. . . . To sit down in some other, safer place and start my wistful brooding all over again.
>
> For if anyone ever entered my life for more than a few days or a few weeks at a time, the doors would remorselessly swing together and shut them out again, just as though they worked on springed hinges. And then inevitably, the next following New Year's Eve, I'd resurrect them in memory and toast them and mourn their passing. I cherished my solitude; I liked to have something to lament. And more pertinently, it made a wonderful background for my work. It sat well on me when I was young. Then when I no longer was quite so young, it sat less well. By that time it wasn't altogether a fantasy any more, a self-imposed wishful state, either; but I could no longer tell the one from the other by then, anyway. The self-imposed had become the extraneously-imposed, and loneliness was real.

Some crucial information is being suppressed here—notice for example how he conceals his homosexuality behind words like "someone" and "them"—but in a general sense this seems to have been the shape of Woolrich's life as he entered his fifth decade.

In our 1979 interview, Lee Wright connected his portrayal of women in his fiction with his ambivalence about them as a man. His female characters, she said, were "very stiff. He was too reverential. He was, the way it was with his mother, too much in awe of women. . . . I felt that he had overwhelming reverence for women . . . [and that] it stemmed from his own reaction to women. . . . He had no normal relationships with women. He couldn't have them. . . . [But] he wanted it enormously." How he must have longed for the kind of miracle to happen to him that, as the god of his private universe, he bestowed on the emotionally desperate young couple in his next novel!

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Deadline at Dawn was purchased by Lippincott in September 1943 (as *The Clock on the Paramount*) and published as a Story Press book and under the William Irish byline early in 1944. In stretching his

1941 pulper "Of Time and Murder" to novel length, Woolrich changed his main characters' names, backdated the action to the summer of 1939 to explain why the male lead wasn't in uniform, kept the original story line intact but deepened and darkened the relationship between the protagonists and, most important of all, added thousands of words of fresh incident and *noir* atmosphere, so that every detail becomes charged with the essence of the New York nightscape and every momentarily glimpsed person bears the weight of those who prowl the streets through the long and lonely hours. As in the magazine tale, the entire action of the novel takes place between a little before 1:00 A.M. and a little after 6:00 A.M. on a single night, and the clock faces printed in the text allow us literally to see the passage of time, to count the hours and minutes as the protagonists race to get out of the malevolent city before the sun rises.

The novel as usual has no dedication—who was there for him to dedicate a book or anything else to?—but is prefaced by a couplet from a poem by Pauline Havard which signals what we are to expect more clearly than quotations of this sort generally do in Woolrich:

. . . Each hour, each minute
Can hold all Hell or Heaven in it—

The concentration on moments of time, extremes of rapture randomly interspersed with extremes of despair, it's all laid out for us before we read a word of *Deadline at Dawn*.

Which opens in that perfect Woolrich setting, a taxi dance mill. The time, a clock-face tells us, is 12:50 A.M., ten minutes to closing, less than ten minutes before Bricky Coleman's first encounter with the man who will change her life. Woolrich's description of the grim repetitive hopelessness of her existence harks back to his 1938 classic "Dime a Dance" and makes us wonder whether it's not based on the way his own existence looked to him.

> He was just a pink dance-ticket to her. A used-up one at that, torn in half. Two-and-a-half cents' worth of commission on the dime. A pair of feet that kept crowding hers before them all over the map, all over the floor, all over the night. . . .
>
> That was all any of them were to her. She loved her job so. She loved dancing so. . . .
>
> She had only one friend in all this town. It stayed still, it didn't dance, that was one thing in its favor. And it was always on hand, night after night, seeming to say: "Buck up, kid, you've only got another hour to go. You can do it, you've done it before. . . ."

> It seemed to say those things to her every night. It never let her down. It was the only thing in the whole town that gave her a break. . . . It was the only thing in all the endless world of her nights that had a heart.
>
> . . . . Glowing softly against the taffeta backdrop of the night. A luminous circle, like a hoop. With twelve luminous notches around the inside of it. And a pair of luminous hands to tell them off, that never jammed, never stopped dead and played a dirty trick on her, always kept plugging for her, kept inching ahead, to get her off and out of here. It was the clock on the tower of the Paramount. . . . It was like a face—all clocks are. It was like the face of a friend. . . .

The faceless young man dancing with her tries to talk with her in the flashing darkness. She puts him down with concentrated nastiness.

> Why look into her face to find out what had made her this way? . . . Why not look into the slot at the Automat on 47th—the one that had swallowed up the last nickel she had in the world one never-to-be-forgotten day, and given her back two puffy, swollen rolls; and from then on wouldn't open again for her, no matter how often she stood longingly before it, for she had no further nickels to put in. . . .
>
> The answer was . . . not in her face. . . . Faces are masks, anyway.

This however is a particularly strange one among the hundreds of anonymous men in her life. He has a roll of a hundred dance tickets on him which he bought at the door, a waste of almost ten dollars, and then as the mill closes down he balls the roll up and throws it on the floor as if it's useless to him. Later, on the street as she is going home, he's still hanging around as if he has no home himself to return to. He saves her from a nightcrawler who tries to force her into a taxi with him, then starts to follow her home, not arm in arm but walking several feet behind her, staring through the darkness like a hunted animal of the city.

> Up a tunnel-dim side-street, that had once carried a lateral branch of the Elevated over to Ninth Avenue. . . .
>
> The street lampposts, few and far apart, would talcum them thinly white for a moment or two like something sifting downward from the punctures of a reversed container, then their figures would darken again, blend into the gloom.

They cross Ninth Avenue, heading west, toward the river.

> They climbed the opposite curb, and went on into the maw of the ensuing westward block. Three anemic light-pools widely spaced down its seemingly endless length did nothing to dilute the gloom; they only pointed it up by giving it contrast. As if saying: See, this is what light is like—when there is any.
>
> There was a clamminess to the air now, a sense of nearby water, that had been lacking further over. A tug-siren groaned dismally somewhere in the night ahead of them. And then another one answered it, way over near the Jersey side.

Her neighborhood. Her home, where she goes in, leaving him alone behind her on the street.

> She was alone now. She was alone for the first time since eight tonight. She was without a man. She was without a man's arms around her. She was without somebody's breath in her face. She was by herself. She didn't know much about what heaven was like; but she imagined when you died and went to heaven, heaven must be like this—to be alone, without a man. . . .
>
> This was it. This was home. This. This *place*. This was what you'd packed your valise and come here for. This was what you'd looked forward to when you were seventeen. This was what you'd grown pretty for, grown graceful for, grown up for. All over the place, you could hardly move, it was littered with shards. Ankle-deep, knee-deep. You couldn't see them. Shattered dreams, smashed hopes, busted arches.
>
> Here you cried sometimes, cried low and quiet to yourself, deep in the night. But on other nights, that were even worse, you just lay dry-eyed, not feeling much, not caring any more. Wondering if it would take very long to grow old, if it would take very long to— Hoping it wouldn't.

He, the man, doesn't go away, stands out there frozen on the sidewalk three floors under her window. Until he sees something coming toward him along the street and darts into her doorway.

> For a moment there was no sign of what had caused his hasty retreat. The street stretched lifeless under her, gunmetal-dark save where the forlorn halo of the lamppost down there whitened it a little.
>
> She stayed there, face pressed to the window, waiting,

> watching. Then suddenly, without any warning sound, something white, shaped like an inverted boat, came drifting past on the dark tide of the night.

It's a police car, and she knows now, as if it hadn't been clear before, that the man in her doorway is on the run. For no rational reason at all and contrary to every instinct the city has pounded into her, she slips downstairs and invites the fugitive into her room for a cup of coffee. The senseless mitzvah alters her life forever: while pouring himself a cup the young man happens to glance down at a letter she's writing home to her mother and discovers that this beaten-down young woman grew up one street away from his own childhood home in Glen Falls, Iowa! It's the most benevolent coincidence in the entire four and a half decades of Woolrich's creative life but the kind of coincidence that fits perfectly in a world where each moment may hold heaven as well as hell.

As Bricky gets better acquainted with Quinn Williams, her newfound boy-next-door, it almost seems as if heaven is in her drab and dreamless little cave with them.

> They talked about it, their home town, for a while, voices low, eyes dreamily lidded. They brought it close, in through the window, into the very room with them. They pushed New York, hanging around in the night outside, back, far back and away. The Paramount clock, riding the night sky somewhere beyond the window, receded, and instead they could almost hear the steeple bell of the little white church down by the square softly, sweetly, tolling the hour. Saying, "Sleep. I'm looking after you. You're home where you belong. Sleep. You're safe, I'm keeping watch over you—. . . ."
>
> Twice, three times, her fist struck lightly at the tabletop, in futility. "Home," he heard her say smotheredly. "Home, where I belong—I want to see my Mom again—"

The ecstatic paean to small-town life goes on for several pages, and even though just a little more than a year earlier (in the 1942 pulper "The Hopeless Defense of Mrs. Dellford") Woolrich had taken the opposite tack, contrasting the gossipy intolerance of bucolic New Cordoba with the liberating anonymity of the big city, this time the evocation is so intense that we really believe, at least for the length of the book, that Glen Falls is heaven and New York hell.

Why then hasn't Bricky gone back long ago? Not for lack of money: she's saved up a nest egg for the trip, which she keeps in the stuffing of her mattress. Not because she's lied to her mother and former friends and neighbors about her success in the big town: they're all warmearted little people and won't hold it against her. The real reason, she ells Quinn, is that she *can't*, that the city won't let her go, that she's its risoner.

> "You think of it as just a place on the map, don't you? I think of it as a personal enemy, and I know I'm right. The city's bad; it gets you down. It's got a half-nelson on me right now. . . .
>
> "I don't know fancy language; I only know there's an intelligence of its own hanging over this place, coming up from it. It's mean and bad and evil, and when you breathe too much of it, for too long, it gets under your skin, it gets into you—and you're sunk, the city's got you. . . . Then it's too late. Then you can go anywhere—home or anywhere else—and you just keep on being what it made you from then on. . . .
>
> "I know that sounds spooky to you. I know you don't believe me. But I know I'm right. I've *felt* it, I tell you. There's a brain, something that thinks on its own, hanging over it. Watching you, playing with you, like a cat does a mouse. It'll let you go a little ways away from it . . . and then just when you think you've made it, you're going to get away altogether, it'll reach out after you and haul you back again. . . . There've been times I could almost feel the *pull* of it. Like when you're in swimming and an undertow gets you. . . .
>
> ". . . . I hate it. It's my enemy. It won't let me go. And . . . I'm not strong enough any more to break the grip it has on me."

At the end of the nightmarish paranoid monologue, Bricky sees a ay of hope; perhaps, if she and Quinn combine their strength, go back o Glen Falls together, they can make it. Quinn's face tightens. "I wish 'd met you yesterday," he says. "I wish I'd met you last night instead f tonight." And he tells her his story, tells her why he's going to be rrested in the morning. It's essentially the same sequence of events as n "Of Time and Murder." He was out of work and out of money and hance flung in his path the key to the front door of a lavish private ouse on East 70th Street and he began to keep watch on the house nd learned that the only person living in it was going to be out with is girlfriend until the wee hours and he used his key to get into the ouse and then broke into the safe in the upstairs den and stole $2,500 n cash which is spread around his pockets right now. In the morning he householder will discover the theft and Quinn will be put away for ears. He attributes to the police the same malevolent omniscience Bricky attributes to the city.

> "They'll know me, they'll get me. Tomorrow. The day after. By the end of the week. What difference does it make? They always do, they never fail to. . . .
>
> "It's no use trying to run out of town, hide somewhere else; that never works either. Not for little guys like me, that are new at it. If they're going to get you, they'll get you wherever it is, whether it's here or some place else. They've got a long reach, and it's no use trying to get away from it. So I guess I'll just stick around and wait."

At this juncture Bricky offers him a proposition. They will use some of her nest egg to replace the money Quinn has already spent on food and dance tickets, and they will go back together to the house on East 70th Street, and he will use the key to break in again and put the $2,500 back in the safe, and then they will catch the 6:00 A.M. bus, the only direct way back to Glen Falls from New York. But, she insists, it's now or never. If they don't catch this particular sunrise bus they'll never be able to do it later, even together. Woolrich makes her such an emotional basket case we come close to forgetting that another bus will leave for Iowa the next day, for if we remember this, the race against the clock becomes senseless.

And so at 2:00 A.M. they make their way together into the night.

> They came out into the slumbering early-morning desolation, flitted quickly past the brief bleach of the close-at-hand street-light, and were swallowed up again in the darkness on the other side of it. The street-lights, stretching away into perspective in their impersonal, formalized, zig-zag pattern, only added to the look of void and loneliness. . . .
>
> It was like walking through a massive, monolithic sepulchre. There was no one abroad, nothing that moved. Not even a cat scenting at a garbage-can. The city was a dead thing, over here on its margins, and like a dead thing it was stark and clammy, it frightened them a little. . . . They were huddled together shoulder to shoulder as they moved. Their footsteps echoed hollowly in the exacerbated stillness, as though the street were one long plank bridging a hollow space beneath them.

"Goodbye, Manhattan," Quinn says, evoking the title of one of Woolrich's best stories of the thirties—indeed a Fugitive Couple story like this one—and a few minutes later Bricky says something about the malevolent city that anticipates the title of a Woolrich novel to be published the following year:

> "It's watching us. It's got a thousand eyes. Every time a street goes by, it's like there was an eye hidden deep back along it somewhere, an eye that we can't see. . . . We haven't fooled it any. It knows we're trying to run out on it. It's going to trip us up yet if it can."

And so it does. Bricky waits in the shadows outside while Quinn reenters Stephen Graves' house to return the money. Minutes tick away. Quinn comes out, dazed, shuddering, and tells her that Graves is lying on the floor of his den, shot to death in the time between Quinn's visits. "I'm finished. Cooked. They'll think I did it." But Bricky, having come this far, refuses to bow to the city's power.

> "The city, the city," she breathed vindictively. "We'll show it. We're not licked yet. The deadline is still good. We still have until daylight. No one knows yet. . . . No one knows; only us—and whoever did it. We've still got time. Somewhere in this town there's a clock that's a friend of mine. I know that it's saying right now, even if we can't see it from where we are, that we've still got a little time. . . .
>
> "Come on, we're going back in there and see if we can figure this thing out. We've got to. It's our only hope. We want to go home; you know we do. We're fighting for our happiness, Quinn; we're fighting for our lives. And we have until six o'clock to win our fight."

And the two of them go into the house, "into the place where death was." The time is 2:23 A.M.

The emphasis in the next chapter is on finding clues and making deductions, Ellery Queen–style, and Woolrich sneaks in a neat tip of the hat to Fred Dannay when he mentions that one of the books on Graves' shelves is a famous Queen novel, *The Tragedy of X* (1932). But there is nothing cerebral or leisurely about this detection sequence, and Woolrich never lets us forget death or the ticking clock.

> So this is that thing we're all so afraid of, ran the current of her thoughts. This is that thing that has to happen to all of us, to myself, to Quinn, so young, so agile in there, to everyone else, some day. So this is where all my dancing leads to, and all my scraping of pennies; all my snarling and clawing at my annoyers, all my hanging onto my ideals of person. All those rolls I take out of the slots at the Automat day after day, I'm only fooling myself, they can't keep this away—So this is it. So this . . . .
>
> Behind them on the book shelf there was a clock. They both

> kept from turning to look at it by sheer willpower alone. But they could hear it. It kept chopping up the silence fine. It kept going *tick-tock, tick-tock,* so mockingly, so remorselessly, so fast. Never stopping, never letting up, *going, going, going*—

From clues left behind in the den—a piece of cuff button, a mangled cigar stub, a whiff of perfume—they conclude that Graves had two visitors, a man wearing a brown suit and a left-handed woman, and that these people visited Graves separately, not together. But nothing indicates which of the two was an innocent late caller and which the murderer. And with three hours to go, Quinn and Bricky have no choice but to split up, each pursuing one of the trails, and to meet back at the house no later than 5:45. There can be no reprieve, no extension of time. "At daylight, at six, there's the bus that leaves for home. The *last* bus, Quinn, remember that, the *last* bus. I don't care what the schedule says, for us it's the last bus there is, the last in the world."

The next three chapters are episodic as the overall structure of most of Woolrich's previous novels had been and especially reminiscent of the chapters in *Phantom Lady* where a man and a woman facing another sort of deadline had separately pierced the lives of various people of the darkness. First Quinn drops into an all-night drugstore a few blocks from Graves' house and picks up the trail of a man, an exceptionally frightened-looking man who smoked a cigar and kept the lapels of the jacket of his brown suit held tight against his chest as if he were freezing, or perhaps bleeding. He follows the trail to a local hospital, to a waiting room off an upstairs corridor, to the man himself—who turns out to have had nothing to do with Stephen Graves or the main plot. Meanwhile Bricky goes to the all-night hack stand at 70th and Madison and picks up the trail of a left-handed woman who took a cab downtown to Seventh Avenue just above 14th Street. She follows the trail to an all-night delicatessen, to the apartment building next door, to one unit in that building, to a woman in that unit—whom she terrorizes into confessing that she did indeed shoot a man in Stephen Graves's neighborhood a few hours before. Unfortunately for Bricky, the man was not Graves. Meanwhile uptown, Quinn has picked up another trail, the trail of a solitary man drinking alone in a night-haunted bar, a man with terror in his eyes In a scene built around the most pervasive visual motif in the *films noirs* of the forties whose directors owed Woolrich so much, Quinn spies on his quarry in the back bar mirror. When the other discovers the strange eyes watching him in the glass he bolts out of the tavern and Quinn stalks him quietly through the shadowed streets, and seizes him—and the man turns out to have had nothing to do with Stephen Graves or the main plot. None of these blind-alley encounters come from the densely packed pulper "Of Time and Murder" but they all contribute to the nightworld atmosphere and increase our sense of tension as the clock ticks away toward dawn.

At 3:45 A.M. a frustrated Bricky returns to Graves' pitch-black house and has a terrifying *mano a mano* with a figure in the darkness who turns out to be the equally frustrated Quinn. Desperately they search the den a second time, hoping for another clue, and find two, one leading to Graves' male visitor and the other to the woman. Once more they separate. The time is 4:20 A.M. The book is drawing to a close and so is the night. Quinn and the man he's stalking play cat-and-mouse over the phone, in an all-night cafeteria off Columbus Circle, in an after-hours bar in a brownstone on 51st Street. Bricky and the woman she's stalking play cat-and-mouse in perhaps the most dismal of all the hundreds of dismal hotel rooms in the city of endless night.

> She turned and walked down the musty, dimly-lighted corridor, along a strip of carpeting that still clung together only out of sheer stubbornness of skeletal weave. Doors, dark, oblivious, inscrutable, sidling by; enough to give you the creeps just to look at them. All hope gone from them, and from those who passed in and out through them. Just one more row of stopped-up orifices in this giant honeycomb that was the city. Human beings shouldn't have to enter such doors, shouldn't have to stay behind them. No moon ever entered there, no stars, no anything at all. They were worse than the grave, for in the grave is absence of consciousness. And God, she reflected, ordered the grave, for all of us; but God didn't order such burrows in a third-class New York City hotel.

Woolrich crosscuts from Bricky to Quinn and back to Bricky as in each episode the mouse turns on the cat, as Quinn's male target desperately tries to kill him and Bricky's female target likewise frantically tries to kill her. Chance or fate or a kindly star brings all the major players in the game back to Graves' house for an action climax, and then comes the last race, downtown to the 34th Street terminal in a furious rush to intercept the six o'clock bus. The most unforgettable moment in the book's final chapters is Bricky's prayer to her clock: "Oh, Clock on the Paramount, that I can't see from here, the night is nearly over and the bus has nearly gone. Let me go home tonight."

On the level of plot mechanics *Deadline at Dawn* is as flawed as the vast majority of Woolrich's novels. The crucial race against time, as we've seen, is pure artifice, imposed not by objective circumstance as in *Phantom Lady* but by the author's fiat. That each of the people

Quinn and Bricky encounter along the false trails has one or more characteristics in common with one of Stephen Graves' visitors is stretching the rubber band of coincidence beyond the snapping point. When the protagonists are called on to reason, the results tend to be of superlative goofiness—for example, Bricky's insistence that Graves' fiancée couldn't possible be the killer because then her photograph wouldn't still be in a frame on his night table. The real story behind the murder turns out to be boringly routine, and the truth is discovered only because the woman blackmailer didn't make her demands over the phone or by mail like any rational person but by slipping Graves a note in public, at a nightclub, while Graves and his fiancée were dancing on a conga line! Likewise the only reason Bricky and the killers return to Graves' house for the climax is that previously Bricky has stolen Joan Bristol's hotel bill from her purse on blind impulse. But *Deadline* depends on plot less than any other Woolrich novel, and rare indeed is the reader who can remember or even give a damn who shot Stephen Graves and why. This novel stands or falls on *mood*. And Woolrich creates that mood with such intensity that nothing but extensive quotation can convey the book's essence. Analytical description and critical dissection are almost unthinkable.

Almost but not quite. The emotional power of the writing seemed to put off the *Herald-Tribune*'s Will Cuppy, who remarked: "This soft-boiled piece is for those who can use a little pathos with their murder." And the reviewer for *The New Yorker* was not blinded by the smoke screen of the ambience: "Some staggering coincidences make a good deal of this hard to believe, but you'll probably find it exciting anyhow." Perhaps the great strengths of *Deadline at Dawn* were best summed up by Elizabeth Bullock in *Book Week*: ". . . the mood of danger in the night is real and you will care very much what happens."

Which, judging from the novel's subsequent history, readers did—and not just readers either. It was included in the Detective Book Club's March 1944 triple volume around the time that RKO bought the movie rights. A thirty-minute radio adaptation, based more on the source story "Of Time and Murder" than on the novel, was broadcast in January 1945 on *Molle Mystery Theatre*. An uncut paperback edition for military personnel (Armed Services pb #878, 1945) came out near the end of the war. In 1946, on the heels of RKO's movie, World Publishing Company issued a hardcover reprint of the novel, garnished with several fascinating stills from the picture, and *Lux Radio Theatre* aired a sixty-minute adaptation owing more to the film than to the novel. The book was then reprinted in an abridged digest-sized softcover for the general public (Bestseller Mystery pb #B90, 1947), and in 1948 a second hour-long radio version, this one following not the movie but the novel, was presented on CBS's *Suspense*. Next came yet another abridged paperback edition (Graphic pb #19, 1949). A new generation of readers encountered *Deadline* when it was included in Lippincott's 1960 omnibus volume *The Best of William Irish*, which was widely distributed as a Mystery Guild book club selection. The only uncut paperback edition published in the United States since the war (Ballantine pb #30653, 1983) features an effective Larry Schwinger cover illustration in the *film noir* style. More editions are sure to come. *Deadline at Dawn* has its faults but there's no better introduction to the Woolrich magic.

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His only new magazine story between *Deadline* and his next novel was submitted as "The Body of a Well Dressed Woman," published as "What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear" (*Dime Detective*, March 1944), and later reprinted as "Fur Jacket." The tale has its moments but ultimately it's another Smart Cop Cracks Perfect Crime exercise, marked by some memorably awful lines—like the opening sentence: "His face got pale, standing at the telephone"—and by one plot flub after another. Desperate for money, and somehow knowing that he's still the beneficiary of his ex-wife's insurance policy, Colin Hughes kills her, tries in the most absurdly stupid way to make her death look like a hit-and-run accident, tries in an even more stupid way to rig a perfect alibi for himself, and is tripped up by Evans, another of those Woolrich cops who can take one look at a body and pronounce that the death was not accident but murder. Needless to add that his thought process is concealed from the reader till the end. The muted sadism of the police work and the evocation of the guilty man's terror as he feels himself cornered bring the story into a *noir* framework of sorts, but this is one of those all too frequent tales where Woolrich was coasting.

• • •

At the beginning of June came his next novel, the fifth in the Black series and the second under his two-book contract with Doubleday. *The Black Path of Fear*, which he expanded from the 1942 novelette "Havana Night," is a breathless fusion of his two heritages as a suspense writer. On the one hand it's full of elements from the pulps—semi-hardboiled protagonist, dope dens, sinister Orientals, secret passages and hair's-breadth escapes—but at the same time it's a powerful contribution to *noir* literature with its evocations of love discovered and love destroyed, its occasionally haunting imagery, its compelling picture of a man alone, a stranger in a strange land, menaced on all sides and fighting for his life. It's reminiscent of *The Black Curtain* in being very short and having a unified nonepisodic plot, of *Black Alibi* in its setting south of the border, of *The Black Angel* in its first-person narration, of *Deadline at Dawn* in that most of the action takes place in a single night, but essentially it's unlike any earlier Woolrich novel and unlike suspense fiction by other writers either.

We open *in medias res*, at a little before 10:00 P.M. on the evening when narrator Bill Scott and his woman Eve have arrived in Havana on the boat from Miami. Nothing is ever said about the war, so the time must be before Pearl Harbor. In the first scene Scott and Eve are steered by their horse-and-carriage driver to Sloppy Joe's, a huge open-air bistro on Zulueta Street, packed with tourists and locals. They elbow their way through the mob and order daiquiris at the bar. Eve is wearing a dazzling white gown, her throat and wrists ripple with jewels. She has had a premonition that she's about to die and is dressed to meet death like a bride. "Your arm around me, your shoulder just behind me—oh, let it come, Scotty, let it come." A sidewalk photographer follows them to the bar and asks to take their picture. Eve rubs herself lovingly against Scott for the shot, the portable tripod is set up, the flashlight powder fizzes blue—and Eve slowly sinks to the floor. A five-piece band on an indoor balcony plays "Siboney." "It makes a good dirge. It breaks your heart for you." Scott still doesn't know what has happened to Eve. "I've got to go out alone in the dark," she whispers to him, "and I've always hated the dark." The next minute, she's gone. Only then does he see the blood drops falling from her body. "They made intricate little patterns, like burgundy snowflakes or midget garnet starfish on a beach." A jade-handled knife is embedded in her back. Instantly the bar empties of customers and Scott is alone with the dead. The long night begins.

Scott's nightmare intensifies when the police arrive. The knife in Eve's back, its jade handle carved in the shape of the monkey that sees no evil, is almost identical to a knife whose handle was carved in the shape of the monkey that hears no evil, and the latter knife, as Scott admits to Inspector Acosta, he himself had bought in Tio Chin's curio shop, in Havana's Chinatown, just before he and Eve had been steered to Sloppy Joe's bar. When Scott shows Tio Chin's receipt to Acosta, he discovers that it's not for the knife he actually bought but for the one with the see-no-evil carving, the one Eve was killed with. Since the couple had just gotten off the boat and no one in Havana knew either of them, Acosta understandably enough accuses Scott of the murder. Eve's body is taken out to the morgue wagon. "So she went out that way, into the black Havana night, without diamonds, without love, without dreams."

Acosta and his men take Scott into Chinatown, an "anthill of swarming humanity" crisscrossed with alleys too narrow for any car to navigate, its darkness mottled with smears of varicolored light from Chinese lanterns. Like the witnesses to whom Scott Henderson appealed in *Phantom Lady*, Tio Chin tightens the noose around this Scott's neck, swearing to Acosta that it was the see-no-evil knife that Scott purchased, and displaying for the Inspector's benefit the only hear-no-evil knife in his inventory. Scott realizes now that he's been framed, that he was steered to Tio Chin's, given a false receipt, steered to Sloppy Joe's and set up to take the fall for Eve's murder, that the knife he actually bought was lifted from his pocket in the bar and returned to Tio Chin's by the murderer. It sounds paranoid and is full of logical holes—who made him buy any knife at all?—but in that ambience of alien menace Woolrich makes us believe it.

Returning through the labyrinth of passages to where they left the police car, Scott bolts for freedom. He flings the cops who are holding him against each other, darts by chance into a building along the alley, races up the dark narrow stairs as hot lead flies after him. "I heard the wall substance suck the bullet in with a little popping sound, like bubble gum in someone's mouth." He stumbles into a pitch-black room on the top floor and literally holds his breath as the cops pound by in the corridor and search for him on the rooftops. He thinks he's alone in the dark—until he sees a red dot hanging in the air across the room. The dot moves closer to him, closer, and the next minute there's a knife against his throat. The blade is in the hand of a Cuban woman. She speaks just enough English and he understands just enough Spanish so that, on a primitive level, they can communicate. Once she knows that the police are after him, she hides him in her own bed, paints his naked torso and back with red dots. The cops force their way in, examine him by flickering candlelight, and beat a hasty retreat when they see the red marks and the woman tells them that her *hombre* is dying of *la viruela*, smallpox.

Alone again, Scott and the woman sit in the dark, in a sort of "wake of the underdogs." First she tells him her story. She is called La Media Noche, Midnight. She's a thief and apparently a prostitute but in many respects she seems to have been inspired by Bizet's Carmen, even to the point that she used to work in a cigar factory. Her lover, Manolito, had been hounded by the police without cause, kept in jail till he contracted smallpox, then sent back to her to die. This, she says, is why she's willing to help Scott. "Flowers on a grave. . . . It's my way of doing something for someone that isn't around any more, I guess." Then he tells her his story. In a flashback chapter we see Scott down and out in Miami, and watch him get a chauffeur's job as a reward for returning a lost and bulging wallet to sadistic nightclub owner Eddie Roman. We see him interact with Roman's snakelike bodyguard Bruno Jordan and with Job, the compassionate and dignified black butler. Then we watch him fall in love with Roman's beautiful and abused wife. Eve likes to be driven to a secluded spot on the beach from which she can look at the horizon, "that line where the water met the sky. That imaginary line that isn't there when you get to it but that promises so much to all of us." In a scene crawling with suspense, they make plans to escape together to Havana but reach the Miami dock just a few steps ahead of the pursuing Roman and Jordan. They had arrived in Cuba less than six hours ago, and now Eve is dead and Scott on the run.

Obviously the man ultimately responsible is Roman, working by remote control, through Havana agents. As Scott and La Media Noche mull over the situation, they glimpse one tiny ray of light: suppose the photographer who was taking the picture of Scott and Eve happened to catch in his shot the real murderer with the see-no-evil knife in his hand? They don't bother to discuss what kind of nitwit would commit a murder with a camera pointed at him, but never mind. Leaving Scott in her room, La Media Noche goes out to Sloppy Joe's to find out who the photographer was. While she's gone, Scott hears creepy sounds in the corridor and sees a ghostlike, skeletal old Chinese tiptoeing on slippered feet into the room next door. La Media Noche returns with the photographer's name and address—Pepe Campos, Calle Barrios—and with an oil-stained seaman's outfit for Scott to wear. Having memorized the woman's directions, Scott goes out into the night city, past cops on the watch for him, through the Chinatown maze, along the brightly lit main avenues, past cafés "sending out a calcium glare that made everything stand out like high noon," with an open-sided trolley car screeching down the center of the boulevard every few minutes, "shedding turquoise sparks from its overhead traction wire and casting a livid, rippling wash along the walls from its ceiling lights." Then into the rabbit warren of obscure little streets on the far side of Havana, past a deserted *cine* with a tattered poster advertising "Fred Astaire en Volando Hasta Rio," and finally into Calle Barrios. He locates Campos' sign on a building wall, climbs another dark stairway to another top floor, breaks in, but too late. Others—obviously the people who first framed Scott and then hit upon the same hunch that brought him here—have broken in ahead of him, taken one of Campos' negatives, and abducted the photographer too. Defeated, Scott retraces his steps through the city to the hovel of La Media Noche. Mulling over his predicament again, Scott and the compassionate woman of the night conclude that the only way Eddie Roman could have had so many murderous Cuban agents on tap is if he were a drug smuggler. Then when they hear strange noises next door, La Media Noche tells Scott that her skeletal Chinese neighbor is a hopeless opium addict whom she feeds to save him from starving to death. It follows as the night the day that the people supplying the old man must be part of Roman's drug operation. Scott and La Media Noche awaken the addict and bribe him to take the still disguised Scott to where he buys his dreams, a sleazy dive called Mama Inez, which happens to be back-to-back with the curio shop of Tio Chin.

Scott enters the lion's den and the pulpy part of the novel gets under way, full of secret passwords, Asian zombies, opium pipes and close calls. By morning Tio Chin is dead, the man who killed Eve has been beaten by the police into a confession, Campos is saved from a watery grave, one print of the crucial photograph has been found, the Cuban end of Roman's drug combine is in a shambles and Scott is free. He goes back to Miami alone, waits for the deep of the night, breaks into Roman's beachfront mansion and gently awakens him from sleep. Roman offers him $150,000 to spare his life. "I want Eve back." He offers $250,000. "I want Eve. Didn't you hear me? I want Eve." $750,000. "Eve. I want to hear her talk to me again. I want to see her look at me again. . . ." Roman offers eveything he owns if Scott will only let him live. "But I don't want everything. I don't want anything. . . . All I want is just Eve. . . ." And he begins to strangle Roman in his bed. If the imagery of Eve's death scene which began the novel was that of a virgin bride's deflowering, the evocation of Roman's death which ends the book suggests a savage homosexual coupling: the "echo of a smothered scream," the rustling of the sheets "as if he were being very restless in his bed," the wild flailing of his legs "like the blades of a pair of crazed scissors." Unlike the homosexually charged death scene in the 1936 story "The Night I Died," this one ends with blood and mutilation. Afterward Scott returns to Havana for a last visit with La Media Noche. They part in front of Sloppy Joe's.

> "I'd like to ask you in for a drink," I said, "but—"
>
> "I know. There's someone waiting for you in there. Flowers on a grave."
>
> She dusted off my sleeve with a comradely flick of her hand, and that was her way of saying good-by, I guess. Two ships that pass in the night; two paths that cross in the dark . . .
>
> It was lonely standing there by myself at the bar like that.

Reviews of *The Black Path of Fear* were copious but mixed. Will Cuppy twitted Woolrich for using "metaphors you wouldn't believe," and the Kirkus review service thought the plot was "not hard to anticipate." Perhaps the most accurate description of the novel came from the *Springfield Republican*, which called it "a grim and thrilling tale of atmosphere and mordant character portraiture, laced with desperate action and suspense, crowned with vengeance . . . Woolrich holds your attention from first to last."

That verdict is supported by the novel's subsequent history. In August 1944 it was reprinted in a Detective Book Club triple volume and also became the basis of an excellent thirty-minute radio play (possibly scripted by Woolrich himself) on the *Suspense* series.

Abridged versions of the book ran both in a pulp (*Detective Novel Magazine*, April 1945) and in paperback (Thriller Novel Classic pb #29, 1945). In the year after that came a rerun of the *Suspense* radio drama, an ambitious if deeply flawed movie version (*The Chase*), an hour-long radio adaptation of the movie, and the first unabridged paperback edition (Avon pb #106, 1946). The novel was reprinted twice in the fifties in digest-sized format (Jonathan Press pb #J61, 1953; *Bestseller Mystery Magazine*, July 1958) and once in the sixties, in the year of Woolrich's death, as a conventional-sized paperback (Ace pb #H66, 1968). The most recent pocket edition (Ballantine pb #30488, 1982) is enhanced by Larry Schwinger's superb cover illustration of the pursuit up La Media Noche's staircase. *The Black Path of Fear* may not represent Woolrich at his absolute best but it's a strong addition to the canon of *noir*.

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In his only new magazine story of the summer, "Picture Frame" (*Black Mask*, July 1944), he reverted to his pulp shticks again with less than earth-shaking results, although the tale actually begins with what the protagonist thinks is an earthquake. New York cop Buck Nelson, in Hollywood on the trail of a fugitive, is awakened by a furious pounding on his door. His visitor is none other than the man he's hunting, con man Clip Rogers, who may or may not be the same character from Woolrich's 1936 pulper "Afternoon of a Phony." Rogers begs Nelson to save him from a murder rap he's been framed for, and in the kind of flashback sequence that was soon to become the norm in *film noir*, we hear Rogers' story. Hollywood star Lucille Lafitte had caught him trying to forge her name to a check, but instead of turning him in she had forced him into a crazy scheme to save her lover Lew Dolan from the draft. The plot required Rogers to shoot Dolan in the arm during an induction party at Lafitte's mansion, but things had gone haywire when the shot Rogers fired didn't just nick Dolan but killed him. So much for why the terrified Rogers has surrendered to Nelson and begged his help. The rest is Detection in the Woolrich Vein, featuring screwy logic, slapdash detail work and a ludicrous denouement. But the tale is at least slightly redeemed by the wartime setting, the archetypal situation of a loser framed by a *belle dame sans merci*, and Woolrich's unique ability to generate sympathy for a killer motivated by the death of love. It was his last appearance in *Black Mask*, and far from his best. Perhaps his mind was on other things.

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After-Dinner Story, published by Lippincott early in October under the William Irish byline and as a Story Press book, brought together six of Woolrich's shorter efforts, of which one came from *Story*

Magazine, four from the pulps, and one fresh from the author's typewriter. Whoever made the selections, whether Woolrich himself or Whit Burnett or the two in tandem or some editor at Lippincott, was a shrewd picker: five of the six were excellent. Whoever arranged the collection's table of contents so that the half-dozen were jumbled around in defiance of chronological order missed a golden opportunity, since the book's title would have better caught the Woolrich magic had it been *The Night Reveals*. Maybe the arrangement was random so as to reflect Woolrich's view of the arrangement of the world. In any event, the book as published consisted of "After-Dinner Story" (1938), "The Night Reveals" (1936), "An Apple a Day" (new), "Marihuana" (1941), "Rear Window" (1942, as "It Had to Be Murder"), and the only weak item in the collection, "Murder-Story" (1937).

Internal evidence hints that "An Apple a Day" had been written no more than two years before its appearance in *After-Dinner Story*. Its episodic framework seems to have been inspired by the 1942 movie *Tales of Manhattan*, which recounted how a dress tailcoat changed the lives of each of its five owners in ways ranging from comic to poignant, and the lower-depths ambience of the story's most powerful vignette is a direct outgrowth of the Marty Blair episode in Woolrich's 1943 novel *The Black Angel*. A Runyonesque thief sneaks a $50,000 diamond out of an exclusive New York jewelry shop by slipping it into an apple with a hollowed-out compartment and tossing the apple through an upstairs window to his partner in the street below. The thieves' signals get crossed and the apple falls into a passing baby carriage. "Mrs. Rosoff had with her, in the tormented bedding of the carriage, a loaf of bread, a bottle of horseradish, ten cents worth of potatoes, five cents worth of soup-greens, three apples, an orange, a rubber ball, and her son, Seymour." There the apple sits during a Jewish lower-middle-class comedy sequence of the sort that today's readers would associate with a Neil Simon autobiographical play or a Woody Allen movie. A breath of wind knocks the fruit off the Rosoffs' windowsill and drops it onto the fire escape of another apartment, where it's picked up by a desperate young man at the end of his financial tether and on the brink of suicide. He tosses it into a garbage can on the street just before jumping in front of a subway. It's retrieved by a nameless alcoholic derelict who wanders the nightscape waiting for the oblivion of rotgut liquor and the ultimate oblivion of death. Two other derelicts kill him for the pennies in his pockets and the apple rolls into the gutter. Ultimately it is eaten and excreted by a mounted patrolman's horse. Fiction just doesn't come bleaker or more powerful than this story.

Reviewers tended to praise *After-Dinner Story*—except for Will Cuppy, who called it "a collection for the less fussy customers"—and it was reprinted over the next few years both as a knapsack book for the military (Armed Services pb #S20, 1945) and, under a more criminous-sounding title, as a conventional softcover (*Six Times Death*, Popular Library pb #137, 1947). The title story and "The Night Reveals" were adapted for radio's *Suspense*, and the latter tale was repeated again and again on the series throughout the forties. "Rear Window" of course became the basis of Alfred Hitchcock's classic 1954 movie of the same name. When the collection was reprinted in hardcover, along with *Phantom Lady* and *Deadline at Dawn*, as part of Lippincott's 1960 omnibus volume *The Best of William Irish*, it introduced Woolrich's short fiction to a new generation (myself included) too young to have read these stories in the pulps. Reviewing the original edition for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Anthony Boucher said: "Most of these six stories are firstrate specimens of that master of suspense and terror of the commonplace. If you liked *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* . . . you'll be equally engrossed by this—even if one or two may strike you as a bit too patly ironic."

It wasn't just in this collection that Woolrich's shorter work was revived that year. His 1938 classic "Dime a Dance," which had been reprinted in 1941 in the debut issue of *EQMM*, was resurrected yet again in *Best Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (Detective Book Club, 1944), a selection by Fred Dannay from the periodical's first thirteen numbers. A few months later, in the September *EQMM*, Dannay reprinted Woolrich's shivery 1941 short-short "The Customer's Always Right" under a more characteristically Woolrichian title, "The Fingernail." A.L. Furman chose the execrable 1938 "Wild Bill Hiccup" for his general-fiction anthology *The Armchair Companion* (Gold Label, 1944), and the fair-to-middling 1940 "Post Mortem" for *The Second Mystery Companion* (Gold Label, 1944). At year's end Whit Burnett included Woolrich's 1937 Fugitive Couple thriller "Goodbye, New York" in a paperback selection of tales from the magazine Burnett himself and Martha Foley had founded, *The Story Pocket Book* (Pocket Books pb #276, 1944).

The returns from all these projects added up to impressive totals for a war year. Woolrich's financial records tell us that his 1944 income approached $16,000: nearly $2,500 from short stories, almost $6,000 from movies, close to $5,000 from novels, just short of $3,000 from radio. Was he enjoying the money or the success? Judge for yourself from what he wrote A.L. Furman for publication in the end pages of *The Second Mystery Companion* about the shape of his existence:

> I have led a completely uneventful life, as far as outward incident is concerned, so it is extremely difficult to find enough substance for a biography. I have been writing professionally since my adolescence—by that I mean, selling what I write—so I escaped the process of "finding them-

> selves" that some writers go through. Whether this is an advantage or not, I do not know.
>
> -EF I live in a hotel in New York. I have lived in hotels all my life; I was brought up in them even as a child. I have traveled now and then, but I suspect it was wasted effort. A hotel room is a hotel room, whether the place outside your windows is called New York, Paris, London or what-not; they all look alike.
>
> This sort of life would be fatal to a writer trying to write realistically; that is, of the world as it is. You don't see anything of it, you don't know anything of it. Fortunately I am a writer of the imagination. What I write is entertainment-fiction, that hasn't a great deal to do with the world as it actually is. So I can write a story of Paris in a New York hotel room, or a story of New York in a Paris hotel room equally successfully. Neither one is Paris, and neither one is New York, but if they entertain, they've made the grade. And that, I think, is about all; both of my philosophy and of this autobiographical effort.

Imagine him sitting there in the darkness, looking out from the window of the Hotel Marseilles at the lights of a city like any other city, letting his grotesque imagination wander, letting his sense of solitude and entrapment fester, then turning to Remington Portable NC69411 and pouring out words in a white-hot storm. Entertaining us.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The year the long war ended and the nuclear age began had very little impact on Woolrich, whose life and work were equally detached from public events. Although the number of his publications during 1945 was small, his income for the year skyrocketed to an astonishing total of over $37,000, more than half from the sale of movie rights: *The Black Angel* was purchased by Universal in March, *The Black Path of Fear* by King Brothers in June and his most recent novel by Paramount in November. That novel, *Night Has a Thousand Eyes,* was his only full-length work of fiction to come out during 1945, but it was the longest he had ever written and, as we'll see, perhaps also his most powerful. His income from novels for the year amounted to almost $11,000, most of it no doubt attributable to royalties on reprint editions of earlier titles. Only four new short stories of his were published in 1945, but there was also a long novelette which he later expanded to book length. Readers who had not caught up with his previous short fiction were treated to a new story collection, two reprints in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and two more in hardcover mystery anthologies. And even though no movies taken from his work came out that year, there were nine nationally broadcast radio adaptations, seven on *Molle Mystery*

Theatre and two on *Suspense.* For the pioneering few who owned television sets in 1945 there was even a live TV version of a Woolrich tale, which netted him a permissions fee of precisely sixty dollars.

The first of his four new stories to come out that year was the most profitable of all the two hundred odd tales he wrote during his fifteen-year burst of creativity, for it was published not in a crime pulp but in a top-of-the-line "slick" periodical which paid astronomical sums for the right material. What was right for such a magazine was not *noir* but upscale romance, and what it bought from Woolrich was his first love tale since the *Breezy Stories* concoctions of the late thirties. "The Girl Who Married Royalty" (*Good Housekeeping,* March 1945) is cut to the usual slick pattern, but Woolrich manages to smuggle in some vibrant visual touches and a few dashes of *noir* coloration. Lovely Alice Harold, daughter of a hairnet tycoon, is flitting from one glamorous pre-war European resort to another in company with her pompous mother, who's determined that Alice snare a nobleman as her husband. A vague but potentially fatal illness condemns Alice to three months at a luxurious Swiss sanitarium where the rich go to recover or die in comfort, "a many-winged white hotel, copiously glassed, its hundreds of windows sparkling in the cold sunshine on a white mountainside of the Bernese Oberland high above a hemmed-in, sapphire-blue lake, whose icy waters seemed to put the fiery sun out with a hiss." One evening in the dining salon she meets a tall, languid, lonely young man of mixed English and Latin descent—like Genaro Hopley-Woolrich? His name is Count Morales and he's staying at the sanitarium because of some mysterious ailment that may kill him if he exerts himself. Within a few hours he and the American girl are Manny and Alice to each other. He is in love with everything American including Gene Autry movies and particularly in love with her. She is fond of him as a friend but doesn't love him, the true man of her dreams being Hunter Bigelow, the rich but untitled gentleman she had left behind in the States under pressure from her mother. But when Mrs. Harold returns to Switzerland at the end of the rest cure, she manipulates Alice into accepting the count's marriage proposal. The newlyweds honeymoon in New York, a kaleidoscope of subways and automats and taxi dance halls, all the scenes Woolrich had immortalized in his suspense fiction. They run into Hunter Bigelow at various parties and become something of a threesome, even traveling together to Florida for the season. This being a Woolrich marriage, there is between Alice and her noble husband not even a hint of sex. When Manny suffers a heart attack after overexerting himself on the beach, Hunter takes care of everything for Alice, and she discovers that she loves him as much as he has always loved her, but of course they're both too decent, and care too much for Manny, to do anything about it. Manny cuts the Gordian knot by graciously committing suicide in a one-car auto wreck after being released from the hospital, leaving happiness forever after as his legacy to the only two people in the world that he cared for. "He was a prince," Hunter says quietly after the nobleman's death.

It was Woolrich's first sale to a major slick since "Soda Fountain Saga" had appeared in *Liberty* way back in 1930, and if it didn't represent him at his most characteristic, at least it was better of its kind than either of the tales Fred Dannay reprinted in *EQMM* during the early months of the year. "What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear," retitled "The Mathematics of Murder," was included in the March 1945 issue, and "Leg Man" in May. Dannay's introduction to the latter story described Woolrich as "an accomplished virtuoso in nearly every type of the modern detective story: the psychological thriller; the story of sheer suspense; the tale of the hunted and the hunter; the story of point-counter-point ingenuity; the crime story tinged with horror; and the straightforward police tale." One might question whether "ingenuity" was the right word for Woolrich's often preposterous plot gimmicks or "straightforward" the proper adjective for his tales of warped psychotics with badges in their pockets, but the main lesson to be learned from the Dannay catalogue is indirect: Wouldn't it be useful if there was a single word for the kind of fiction Woolrich had almost singlehandedly created? In time such a word surfaced, and it is *noir*. Neither of the tales Dannay reprinted in *EQMM* during 1945 falls into that category, and when he touted "Leg Man" as "a half-and-half mixture of pure action and pure deduction [which] will satisfy equally those who prefer thrills and excitement and those who insist on a pure deductive thread plus scrupulous fairness to the reader," he was being outrageously generous to one of Woolrich's silliest stories.

His only new crime-suspense tale published during the first half of the year was just marginally better. "Dipped in Blood" (*Detective Story*, April 1945), more familiar under its reprint title "Fountain Pen," is the exact obverse of one of Woolrich's most haunting short works of the forties, "An Apple a Day." This time, however, the object whose path through several people's lives we follow is a source not of happiness but of death. Indeed it's yet another of Woolrich's not-wisely-but-too-well-loved Bizarre Murder Methods, a fountain pen gimmicked to explode as soon as it's filled with ink. Chance or fate puts the pen in the pocket of someone other than its intended victim, and we then watch it pass tortuously through several hands until finally it goes boom at just the right place and time to bring about a grimly poetic justice. The situation is made to order for a nerve-jangling thriller about the randomness of existence, but this time Woolrich fails to make us care about a single one of his characters, and the result is a plodding mechanical exercise almost totally lacking in suspense.

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Avon Murder Mystery Monthly was the overall title for a series of digest-sized paperbacks launched by the new softcover publisher Avon Books in 1942. Most of the works included in the series were 25¢ reprints of hardcover whodunits by authors ranging from Edgar Wallace and Leslie Charteris to Agatha Christie and Margery Allingham, from Georges Simenon to Frank Gruber to Rex Stout. The only connecting link between the entries in the series was their garishly pulpy cover illustrations. Every so often the publisher's monthly offering would be not a reprint but a paperback original collection of short stories from the pulps, like *Five Murderers* (1944) and *Five Sinister Characters* (1945) by Raymond Chandler, copies of which are treasured by the genre's aficionados. The selection for June of 1945 was a similar volume under the William Irish byline, *If I Should Die Before I Wake* (Avon Murder Mystery Monthly #31, 1945), which is equally valuable today. Although there's nothing in the book itself to support the claim, Anthony Boucher in his review for the *San Francisco Chronicle* mentioned that the six tales in the collection had been chosen by Woolrich himself. Whoever made the choices didn't do at all badly, since three of the half-dozen were among the most powerful stories Woolrich had written for the pulps; and whoever did the cover illustration captured almost perfectly the existential terror and loneliness of the Woolrich world. As in the previous hardcover collections, *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* and *After-Dinner Story*, one tale in this paperback volume had never been printed before, although this may have been an accident of publication timing since it did appear in a magazine right on the heels of its appearance in the Avon book. The contents included three nightmarish classics—the 1937 title story, "A Death Is Caused" (a retitling of 1943's "Mind Over Murder") and "Two Murders, One Crime" (originally published in 1942 as "Three Kills for One")—and a pair of thirties throwaways, "I'll Never Play Detective Again" (1937) and "Change of Murder" (1936). Boucher, who had included Woolrich's 1940 *noir* masterpiece "Finger of Doom" (retitled "I Won't Take a Minute") in his own just published anthology of *Great American Detective Stories* (World, 1945), went out of his way to review *If I Should Die Before I Wake* in his column in the *Chronicle*, describing the collection as "various in quality, but containing at least two of the finest Woolrich-Irish opuses—which is about as fine as terror-suspense comes currently." It was one of the rare times that a forties paperback-original mystery had been reviewed by a major critic of the genre in a major paper.

We can be fairly certain that the single new story in the collection was not one of those Boucher considered among Woolrich's finest. "The Man Upstairs" takes place somewhere in the small-town heartland around the turn of the century and involves three principal characters: an old woman who feels bound by a promise made on the Bible even if forced from her on pain of death; her stepbrother, a brutal escaped murderer who's hiding in her basement; and her book-intoxicated lodger, an old man rumored to have a fortune in cash in his room. Woolrich clearly can't tell the difference between a stepbrother and a half brother, and the story has its full share of ludicrous moments—would you believe the fugitive killer keeps a dog with him through all his wanderings?—but on the whole it's vividly readable and reasonably suspenseful.

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Those who had missed the June Avon Murder Mystery Monthly had a second chance at "The Man Upstairs" when the August issue of the new digest-sized *Mystery Book Magazine* hit the stands. This periodical, edited by Leo Margulies, had been launched in July as something of a competitor to *EQMM*. Unlike the Queen magazine, *Mystery Book* did not use reprints and published long novelettes as well as short stories. In addition to fiction, it offered reviews by the irrepressible Will Cuppy and even a monthly mystery crossword puzzle. In fifty-three issues and more than five years of newsstand life (it became a quarterly of standard pulp dimensions in the fall of 1947) *Mystery Book* offered a huge variety of tales of all lengths by authors like Fredric Brown, Patrick Quentin, Brett Halliday, George Harmon Coxe, Mignon G. Eberhart, Dorothy B. Hughes, Jonathan Latimer, John D. MacDonald, Hugh Pentecost and Lawrence Treat—not to mention Woolrich. Indeed, its second issue, dated August 1945, offered Woolrich twice, once as William Irish with "The Man Upstairs" and again under his real name with a very long novelette, running almost sixty closely printed double-columned pages, an obvious candidate for eventual expansion into a novel. "Four Bars of Yankee Doodle" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, August 1945) opens with New York homicide detective Champ Prescott stepping off the train to spend two weeks of enforced R&R in the remote and inbred peninsular community of Joseph's Vineyard. Within hours of his arrival he has struck up an acquaintance with lovely local artist Susan Marlow, had a brief encounter with the resident halfwit, and proven to the satisfaction of rustic Sheriff Jepson that another boarder at Mrs. Hopkins' roominghouse, whose body has just been found dangling from a noose in the attic, was not a suicide but the victim of murder. (The hanging gimmick comes straight out of Woolrich's 1943 pulper "Death on Delivery.") The next Sunday morning, while most of the townsfolk are at church, the community drunk is killed in what looks like an accidental fall down his cellar steps, but once again Prescott intervenes and does the standard Woolrich cop routine of "Accident? No. It was murder!" The killer, believe it or not, used the staircase to choke his victim to death! In both cases hints are planted that the killer might well be Lon Bardsley, the whistling idiot of Joseph's Vineyard. But after a third murder, this time of the richest woman in town, and after the discovery of hard evidence against Bardsley, Prescott becomes convinced that the mental defective is being framed, and takes steps to protect the man from a lynch mob. Eventually, in the most preposterous display of fake deductive reasoning in the Woolrich canon, Prescott finds the connecting link among the victims, concludes that the serial killer's next and last target will be Susan Marlow, with whom he's fallen in love, and with her consent, does as several other Woolrich cops have done before him, setting a trap for the murderer with the woman as bait. The novelette climaxes in an effective suspense sequence as the killer stalks Susan in her isolated house while Prescott, decoyed away from the scene by one of the dumbest ploys in the literature—a phony telegram in the name of his police commander, summoning him back to New York at once and forbidding him to phone ahead and question the order!—frantically races across the peninsula to save her. The occasional touch of *noir* and one or two haunting moments, mainly involving the interrogation of local women whose lives have been one long hell, can't redeem the screwy plot and the abundance of movie-stereotype characters.

So far during 1945, the quality of Woolrich's new short fiction had been well below that of the best of his earlier tales as reprinted in anthologies like Boucher's *Great American Detective Stories* and collections like *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*. That pattern continued when his 1936 classic "You Pays Your Nickel," retitled "The Phantom of the Subway," was included in A.L. Furman's *The Third Mystery Companion* (Gold Label, 1945). Then near the end of the year came a new Woolrich story that was an absolute masterpiece of *noir*. "Silent as the Grave" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, November 1945) combines the oscillation motif, the economic desperation of the thirties and the race-against-the-executioner theme with almost unbearable emotional force, leading inevitably to a climax of stunning existential malignancy. "It was a night like any other night. The moon was out; and there were stars." Ken Mitchell is asking the woman he loves to marry him. While proposing to Frances he confesses that he once killed a man and was never caught. She swears never to repeat his confession to anyone, for any reason. Their marriage is deliriously happy. Then comes the great crash of 1929, and a sadistic new boss not only causes Ken to lose his job but sabotages his efforts to find another. The Mitchells are thrown on the welfare rolls. One night, while Ken is sitting in a bar, disgusted with himself and morosely getting drunk, his ex-boss is murdered. Another employee the dead man had ruined is charged with the crime, convicted despite his pleas that he's innocent, and sentenced to die. Frances, torn apart by the agony of the condemned man's wife and family, and half convinced by subtle changes in Ken's behavior that he himself may be the murderer, phones the police and tells them everything she knows that supports her suspicion—including Ken's confession to her that he'd killed someone else years before. Ken is arrested for the old murder on the night that the condemned man, after confessing that he is indeed guilty, dies in the electric chair for the new. "It was a night like any other night. There was no moon; there were no stars."

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By the end of the war, at least three of Woolrich's colleagues from the thirties pulps—Raymond Chandler, Frank Gruber and Steve Fisher—were making excellent money as Hollywood screenwriters and turning out stories or hardcover mystery novels only between movie assignments. Farrar & Rinehart, Gruber's principal book publisher during the forties, was headed by Stanley Rinehart, a son of author Mary Roberts Rinehart (1876–1958), who had virtually created the genre of "romantic suspense" as Woolrich had all but singlehandedly created *noir.* It was this firm that published Woolrich's only novel to come out during 1945, his longest and most ambitious to date and one of his most powerful: *Night Has a Thousand Eyes.* For reasons unknown, the byline chosen for the book was neither Cornell Woolrich nor William Irish but a new pseudonym formed from his two middle names, George Hopley. Anyone familiar with the Woolrich style and preoccupations, or with the novelette "Speak to Me of Death" which *Argosy* had run in 1937 under Woolrich's customary name, could not have been fooled. Certainly Frank Gruber wasn't. Sometime after the novel was released, he had a conversation with Stanley Rinehart in which he asked the publisher what he thought of Woolrich as a person. According to Gruber's 1967 memoir *The Pulp Jungle,* "Stanley replied that he had never met him, all the negotiations had been done by mail—although Woolrich lived in New York City!" Clearly Woolrich's lifestyle hadn't changed either, except that now he no longer had Gruber or Fisher around to go bar-hopping with on rare occasions.

Night Has a Thousand Eyes seems to have been intended as a breakthrough book that would introduce Woolrich to a wider audience than the readership for mystery fiction. But it was too grim and unsettling for huge commercial success, and its disappointing performance in the marketplace—no magazine serialization or book club edition and not even a paperback until almost eight years later—should come as no surprise. Of all his novels this is the one most completely dominated by death and fate, the one in which he pulls out all the stops to make us feel the way he felt at age eleven when he understood his own inevitable death: "like some sort of a poor insect that you've put inside a downturned glass, and it tries to climb up the sides, and it can't, and it can't, and it can't." Its leitmotif, the mystic prediction of death at a lion's jaws, may have been suggested to him by an obscure bottom-rung B movie, *On Probation* (Peerless Pictures, 1935), directed by silent serial daredevil Charles Hutchison, and starring Monte Blue, William Bakewell and Lucile Browne. In any event, within a year of the film's release Woolrich had written "Speak to Me of Death" on the same theme, and eight years after that novelette's appearance in *Argosy* he expanded it to three hundred closely printed pages and retitled it *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*.

As usual the book is dedicated to no one, but Woolrich follows the precedent he'd set in a few earlier novels and gives us an introductory motto to prepare us for what is to come. Its source is the Roman Stoic philosopher Epictetus: "Thus death is nothing terrible; . . . but the opinion we have of death, that it is terrible, that is where the terror lieth." If Woolrich had only been able to *believe* that maxim, his inner world would have been infinitely more tranquil and *noir* literature might well have been aborted. As chance or fate would have it, the opinions of death in which he was trained were Christian. *O salutaris hostia*: his wretchedness was our fortune.

Chapter One, "The Meeting," opens as so much of Woolrich opens, with a man alone in the darkness.

> Every night he walked along the river, going home. Every night, about one. You do that when you're young; walk along beside the river, looking at the water, looking at the stars. . . .
>
> . . . . It made the stars seem brighter, and it made you want to look at them more, when the water was there below them to catch them upside down. It made you dream better; those dreams you have in your head in your twenties. . . .
>
> And so—every night he walked along the river, going home. . . .

But this particular night walk beside the starlit river changes Tom Shawn's life forever. Approaching the junction where the road intersects with the great bridge across the water, he notices and picks up a five-dollar bill lying on the pathway. Then he finds another bill, and another, and then a diamond ring which winks "as though one of the stars had become embedded in the pavement." Then he spots the source of all these items, a woman's handbag lying open-mouthed under an ornamental lamppost on the walkway across the bridge. Then, "looking down the vista of lighted and shadowed strips of pavement," he sees the woman herself, about to leap off the parapet. He runs, seizes her as she begins to let go, hauls her back by force onto the walkway and into the world of the living. Her name is Jean Reid and she is young and beautiful and well dressed and she is terrified of the gleaming stars. "Oh, let me get away from them. Let me shut them out. Must they always shine? Won't they ever stop? . . . . Make them stop shining. Make them." He finds her car and drives her away from the river to an all-night restaurant where, with the curtains at the window near the table drawn shut against the starlight, she talks.

Chapter Two, "The Telling," consists of almost one hundred pages of first-person narration, by all odds the longest flashback sequence in the flashback-studded history of *noir* literature and film. Jean is the daughter of Harlan Reid, a wealthy businessman and a widower. There are hints that she loves her father too much. "It was always just my father, my father and I. Sometimes I think that is the strongest of all loves. . . . That is the way it has always been with us, and maybe it is not good, but still we should not have been punished this way." Everything money can buy, she has enjoyed. All the sorrows money can avert, she has never known. Then at a dinner party on the evening before her father is to fly to San Francisco on business, a servant with trembling hands spills a drop of soup on Jean's dress. "Death has begun. Darkness has begun, there in the full jonquil-blaze of the dinner-table candles." The clumsy servingmaid, Eileen McGuire, visits Jean's room after the party and warns her that if Harlan Reid flies home from San Francisco on the night plane he intends to take, he will never come home at all. A friend of hers, Eileen says, has told her this—a friend who can foretell the future. Jean naturally enough ignores the warning and her father leaves on his trip west as scheduled. While he's away, Eileen McGuire keeps insisting that he'll die if he boards the night plane home, until Jean in exasperation fires her. But the warnings prey on Jean's mind, eat into her like acid, and just before his return flight is to leave, she calls the San Francisco airport long-distance to beg him to take the train home instead. Too late: the plane has just left. Anguish tears Jean apart. She dies a hundred deaths, waiting, waiting. Then a bulletin is heard on the radio: that particular flight has gone down over the Rockies, with no known survivors. She dies a thousand deaths more. Then a telegram arrives, from her father. He is alive and unharmed, having changed his mind at the last minute and decided to take the train home after all. Once Reid and his daughter are reunited and she has told him about the prophecy of his death, they visit Eileen McGuire in her decrepit little apartment and prevail on her against her better judgment to introduce them to her friend who can see the future. He is a gaunt and taciturn old man named Jeremiah Tompkins, and indeed he seems to be be able to read minds as well as foresee coming events, since he knows all about the Reids before either has said a word to him. He refuses Harlan's offer of money. "There's nothing I ask of anybody, only to be left alone." But even though he refuses to entertain the Reids or anyone else with his uncanny powers, he does predict that certain precise things will happen to them that very evening, trivial things that no one could anticipate by naturalistic means, like an unexpected visit from a woman with a wristwatch around her thigh. Each of these events comes true. Now they believe n Tompkins, and are terrified by what his powers reveal about the nature of the universe: that what is to happen is predestined and beyond anyone's control. Like puppets on strings they keep going back to the old man, and like a puppet on a string he demonstrates his gift for them again and again, even to the point of giving Harlan Reid investment advice which he accepts blindly and which pays off in handsome profits. Whenever Reid offers him a check as a way of saying thanks, Tompkins tears it up.

Then after several weeks have gone by, the old man reveals his most frightening prophecy: that at the stroke of midnight, on the seam between the fourteenth and fifteenth of June, just a few nights away, Harlan Reid will meet death at the jaws of a lion. In Chapter Three, at the end of Jean's story, with her dawn breaking and the stars briefly gone, Shawn tells her that he's a police detective and persuades her to repeat her account to his commander. Another race against time and death has begun.

In the real world it's unlikely that a precinct station skipper would drop everything else on his desk and plunge into such a case. But this is the Woolrich world, and Lieutenant McManus instantly assigns Shawn and half a dozen other plainclothesmen to work night and day without rest on what so far isn't even a crime. While the other six go out hunting naturalistic explanations for each of Tompkins' prophecies, Shawn is sent to the Reid mansion to protect Jean and her father against the midnight lion of the unknowable. For the next hundred and fifty odd pages, Woolrich crosscuts between four of the six other cops, each pursuing his own lead in the field, and Shawn at the house, helplessly watching the woman he already loves and the father *she* loves come apart at each tick of the clock. The so-called Police Procedure chapters are as brutal as any of the Noir Cop stories Woolrich wrote for the pulps. Detectives Dobbs and Sokolsky frame Tompkins' upstairs neighbor on a prostitution rap, commandeer her apartment as their base, then break into Tompkins' room while he's out and plant a listening device behind the water pipe. In a sequence echoing the one where Carol Richman terrorized the hapless barman in *Phantom Lady*, Detective Schaefer shadows Eileen McGuire, dogs her footsteps implacably through every drab gray aspect of her life until in despair she first visits a church to pray for forgiveness and then, in the ladies' room of a near-deserted movie house, kills hersel Detective Molloy heads for the rural hinterlands to check out a repor of a lion which has either escaped or been let free by someone from flea-bitten traveling carnival, and finds that the beast has alread killed one man and is still loose, apparently headed in toward th city—and the Reid estate.

What the other two cops are doing is never explained in detail probably because their lines of investigation lack *noir* potentia Meanwhile as the minutes left to Harlan Reid tick away, Shawn and Jean work desperately to keep him from cracking open the way Paul Stapp in the 1938 "Three O'Clock" cracked open from the unbearable strain of knowing the exact moment and manner of his death. These chapters of waiting for the lion are filled with haunting *noir* coloration and religious imagery and the taste and smell of fear as Reid looks a his last sunset, eats his last supper, plays a symbolic game of roulette in which the wheel defies the laws of chance and spins against him time after time after time, coming up black, black, black.

In the last hours before midnight, the detectives eavesdropping on Tompkins actually unearth proof of a naturalistic scheme to kill Harlan Reid, but after a surge of emotional excitement and sudden death and uncanny happenings, the scheme turns out to be goofy beyond endurance and only marginally connected with the main thrust of the story line. The clock continues to tick away the minutes and then the seconds, and Woolrich keeps us shivering in our seats literally through the twelve hollow strokes of doom until the thunderous climax plays itself out.

The title of the twenty-first and final chapter, "End of Night," is neither literally nor symbolically accurate.

> The clock was still there. The golden planet still swung. The hollow-hoofed horses still galloped, clop, clop, clop, for someone else now. For the next one. The hands were at four and six. Half past four in the morning.

Shawn and McManus reconstruct the horrific events but can make no sense of them. "There's a 'why' in this too big to go down on any report. It seems to slip away each time you think you've got it pinned down." One of the few things that are clear is the nature of Jeremiah Tompkins: ". . . just a poor tormented soul, cursed from the day he was born; caught in the middle of something, crushed. . . . Wriggling all the time to get free, like a blind worm under a stone." Or like an insect inside a downturned glass and trying to climb up the sides, and it can't, and it can't, and it can't? Overhead the stars still gleam, "like silver hailstones beating into their faces"; and Shawn feels "very small, very unimportant. He felt as though there were no longer any need to worry about what happened to him, whether for good or for ill; that was all taken care of from now on, that was all out of his hands." All that can be done in such a universe is to cling to someone. "You couldn't go on alone, you were too small, too helpless. Two helpless children in the dark." That is how we leave Shawn and Jean, trembling together in the starlight.

Night Has a Thousand Eyes was recognized early on as a major work even by those who didn't recognize Woolrich as its author. Long and sometimes perceptive reviews appeared in most of the major periodicals. Will Cuppy thought the denouement "suitable for a wide audience of good-natured fans willing to smile when they can't swallow some of the morsels. . . ." but conceded that "taken as a gooseflesh novelty on the woozy side, it does nicely." The editor of *The New York Times Book Review* chose not to relegate the novel to regular mystery columnist Isaac Anderson but commissioned a separate review from author James MacBride, who loved it. "The pace never slackens, from the superb cinematic opening . . . to the gelid pay-off . . . . The present reader can only advise you to leave the night-light burning if you insist on finishing this one in bed."

Perhaps it was *too* intense, *too* suspenseful. Although Paramount bought the movie rights almost as soon as the first copies hit the bookstores, the only reprint edition published in the United States during the forties was the Grosset & Dunlap hardcover reissue, timed to coincide with release of the film version in 1948. In the fifties it was reprinted only once, as a paperback (Dell pb #679, 1953) under the William Irish byline. In the last full year of Woolrich's life it came out again in softcover (Paperback Library pb #54-438, 1967), this time as by Woolrich himself. For the most recent paperback (Ballantine pb #30667, 1983), cover artist Larry Schwinger unaccountably chose to render the somewhat bland scene in the all-night cafeteria near the end of the book. Perhaps, the next time it's reprinted, readers will get to experience not only one of the most stunning suspense novels ever written but also a visual image worthy of the book's power.

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Twelve years had gone by since Woolrich's first crime story, six years since his first crime novel. No burst of creativity lasts forever, and in the fall of 1945 a careful reader might have detected the first hint that the suspense master was growing tired. The end pages of *The Third Mystery Companion* contain a letter he wrote in the final months of the war to the anthology's editor, A.L. Furman, discussing his switch in the early thirties from romantic fiction to mysteries. "I was killing them dead now instead of marrying them off," he said, "and I've been doing that ever since. And I'm staying with it, until . . . after the war, about 1952. Then if I have to make another switch, why I can always go back to marrying them off again. Those are the two things they'll always be doing. Marrying and dying." Even before Hiroshima he was at least toying with the possibility of abandoning suspense. As things turned out, for all practical purposes he made the break long before 1952.

As usual, of course, Woolrich is being misleading about himself. At the time he wrote to Furman he must already have sold "The Girl Who Married Royalty" to *Good Housekeeping*, and by the fall of 1945, when Furman's anthology was published, he must already have made his next sale to a glossy women's magazine. "They Call Me Patrice" (*Today's Woman*, April 1946) is a novelette of about the same length as the previous year's "Four Bars of Yankee Doodle," and just as clearly destined for later expansion into a book. The opening scene takes place in New York and shows young and pregnant Helen Georgesson being abandoned by her worthless husband Steve with nothing to survive on but a five-dollar bill and a one-way railroad ticket to San Francisco. All trains in these immediate postwar months are packed solid with travelers, and Helen can't find a seat anywhere until a handsome young man stands up and offers her his place, next to his wife who is also pregnant. The two women quickly become confidantes. Everything Helen doesn't have at all—money, love, a future for her coming child—Patrice seems to have in abundance. As she tells Helen, she met and married Hugh Hazzard while they were both in Europe, and now that she's pregnant they're returning to Middle America so that she can meet Hugh's well-to-do parents for the first time. So far, she says, she hasn't even sent them a photograph.

While Helen and Patrice are in the ladies' room together, the train goes off the tracks, and in the wreckage Helen gives birth. When she awakens from her ordeal she's in a private room in a hospital, surrounded by luxuries. As she eventually realizes, the reason she's not in a charity ward is that she's been wrongly identified as Patrice Hazzard, who died with Hugh in the crash. She does not correct the mistake but grasps what seems to her a heaven-sent new life for herself and her infant son. After recovering from her injuries she and the baby travel on to Caulfield, the perfect Frank Capra community where Hugh's parents embrace her with "all the goodness there is or ever can be in this world." She is in paradise American style, the great good place Quinn and Bricky had rhapsodized about in *Deadline at Dawn*. Mother and Father Hazzard accept her as their own daughter, and in time, with their blessing, Helen begins to fall in love with Hugh's brother Bill, and he with her. The Hazzard parents even change their wills, substituting her as legatee of half their estates in Hugh's place. Then the serpent comes to Eden in the form of Steve Georgesson, Helen's ex-husband (ex by virtue of a Mexican divorce), who has happened to discover her enviable new station in life and sees it as a golden opportunity for blackmail. After extorting money from her he forces her to go with him to the house of a countryside Justice of the Peace where in a quiet midnight ceremony they are married again. Afterward, dropped off at the Hazzard house, Helen finds a gun and makes a return visit to Steve's apartment to kill him, but too late: she finds him dead on the floor. Then there's a pounding on the door, and it's Bill, the man she loves, and the two of them are suddenly in the trap of their lives. "They Call Me Patrice" is a compulsively readable suspense-romance, with a female protagonist as convincing as any male writer could create, and a premise as powerful as any Woolrich ever devised. True to the glossy-magazine ethos, the novelette closes with Helen and Bill united in love and peace thanks to a perfectly timed confession by a character who isn't even mentioned till the last few paragraphs. Two years later, reworking the plot into the novel *I Married a Dead Man*, Woolrich threw out this sugary ending and replaced it with one of the most shattering *noir* climaxes ever.

The women's-magazine market might force Woolrich to drench his fiction in sweetness and light but couldn't make him like it. The same month "They Call Me Patrice" came out in *Today's Woman*, a much more poorly paying mystery pulp ran one of his most radically downbeat classics, "The Light in the Window" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, April 1946). "Night," it begins, "and the soldier stood under the lamppost waiting." He is watching an apartment building across the street, the building where his girl lives. He is home from the war, his body sound, his mind a shambles. While standing there, wondering how to tell her he's back, he is brought up against a barrage of circumstantial evidence that convinces him, as it would any of us, that she has just had sex with another man. He rings her doorbell, moving and talking like a zombie. There is a paperback on her bedside table, and if we attend to the brief description of part of its plot we'll discover that the book she's reading is *Phantom Lady*. He begs her to admit that she's been unfaithful to him. She won't confess. Her fate is the same as that of the woman in *Phantom Lady* who *was* unfaithful, Marcella Henderson. Zombielike, the soldier takes off his belt and strangles her with it. Zombielike, he walks out of her apartment, into the night streets of the city. Suddenly they are transformed into a battleground, and he tries to dig a foxhole in the sidewalk with bare and bloody hands. He mistakes a solicitous passerby for a lieutenant and salutes him. Finally taken back to the psychiatric hospital, he emerges more than a year later as a vegetable, with nothing left but to sit in the park in the sun and wait for the merciful release of death. "You had to wait for it, what else could you do? It was an order, from a lieutenant. A different one, you never saw. But He'd given it just the same; you had to obey." In the last few pages we learn that his girl had not been unfaithful but had been framed, so to speak, by multiple coincidence, and furthermore that the janitor in her building has just been executed for her murder. Then we reenter the mind of the soldier. "You just had to be patient and wait, that was all. You couldn't question a lieutenant." The point of course is that no lieutenant is present. To cite an image from earlier in the story, the protagonist is like "a struggling fly, already trapped but still able to move, trailing over flypaper." And so in the world of Woolrich are we all. The vision of the dark god that should have but didn't come to us at the climax of *The Bride Wore Black* is revealed here in all its malignancy.

"They Call Me Patrice" and "The Light in the Window" were the only new works by Woolrich to appear during 1946, but later in the year came two story collections under the William Irish byline, one in hardcover and the other a paperback original, which introduced some of his best pulp tales and some of well below classic stature to the non-magazine-reading mystery audience. The hardcover volume, *The Dancing Detective*, was published by Lippincott in May as a Story Press book. History doesn't reveal who chose the eight tales the book contains, but some credit must go to Fred Dannay since he had already reprinted four of the eight in *EQMM*. As in the previous Woolrich collections, the stories in this one were printed in random sequence with no regard for chronological order. The title tale was the 1938 classic "Dime a Dance" under a different name and the second entry, "Two Fellows in a Furnished Room," had appeared in the pulps in 1941 as "He Looked Like Murder." Third and fourth came two gems of *noir*, the all-but-brand-new "The Light in the Window" and 1945's "Silent As the Grave." If only the contents had stopped there! "The Detective's Dilemma" (1940), "Fur Jacket" (1944, as "What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear") and "Leg Man" (1943) were, to put it kindly, substandard. The collection closed with a short-short shocker, "The Fingernail," which had first appeared in 1941 as "The Customer's Always Right." Reviews as usual were quite decent. "It is not precisely a bedside book unless one is immune to nightmares," said Isaac Anderson in the *New York Times*, "but it is excellent for the connoisseur of good short stories." At the opposite end of the country, Anthony Boucher in the *San Francisco Chronicle* mentioned that the retitling and re-bylining of the tales in the collection could give a bibliographer nightmares, but went on to say: "Nightmares of a more masochistically pleasant nature await the reader who recognizes in Irish-Hopley-Woolrich the great living master of what the psalmist calls 'the noonday devil'—the infinite terror of prosaic everyday detail." The collection has been reprinted in softcover only once

(Popular Library pb #309, 1951), but its title story has been anthologized again and again in succeeding decades.

The first year of peace and the lifting of wartime paper quotas led to a huge increase in the number of books by Woolrich (not to mention scores of other writers) which were reprinted in inexpensive formats. The Avon paperback house seems to have gone on a Woolrich binge during 1946, publishing 25¢ editions of *The Black Angel, The Black Path of Fear* and the Murder Mystery Monthly collection *If I Should Die Before I Wake*, and World, which was primarily a hardcover reprint house, offered a cheap reissue of *Deadline at Dawn*, illustrated with stills from the just-released movie. Meanwhile Woolrich's pulp stories continued to be snapped up for revival in magazines and anthologies. "If the Dead Could Talk" (1943) was in the July 1946 *EQMM* and "Face Work" (1937), which Fred Dannay retitled "Angel Face," greeted readers of the same year's December issue. *Rex Stout's Mystery Quarterly/Magazine/Monthly*, which Avon had launched at the end of the war as a sort of bush-league version of *EQMM*, reprinted 1945's "The Man Upstairs" in February, 1940's "Post Mortem" in June, and 1941's "Nightmare" (originally entitled "And So to Death") in December. An anonymously edited paperback anthology of that spring, *The Avon Mystery Story Teller* (Avon pb #86, 1946), included Woolrich's 1938 classic "Three O'Clock," and the same story popped up again a few months later in *And the Darkness Falls* (World, 1946), a hardcover anthology nominally edited by horror-movie star Boris Karloff. Frank Owen, editor of the year's largest mystery anthology, *Murder for the Millions* (Frederick Fell, 1946), included no fewer than four Woolrich tales—"Change of Murder" (1936), "The Man Upstairs" (1945), "The Body of a Well-Dressed Woman" (1944, as "What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear"), and "The Orphan Diamond" (1942, as "Orphan Ice")—but printed two of these under the Woolrich byline and the other two as by William Irish, as if that pseudonym could still fool anyone. A.L. Furman followed the same strategy, reprinting in *The Fourth Mystery Companion* (Lantern Press, 1946) two of the author's stories, neither previously in any anthology or collection—"Twice-Trod Path" (1937, as "Guns, Gentlemen") and "Library Book" (1939, as "The Book That Squealed")—but bylining only one as by Woolrich, the other as a William Irish tale. In his end notes on contributors to the volume, Furman had this to say about Irish and Woolrich.

> William Irish is 36, brown hair, blue eyes, height 5 foot 9. Born in New York. Has a rotten disposition. . . . He is married on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

> Cornell Woolrich is 36, brown hair, blue eyes, height 5 foot 9. Born in New York. Has a fair disposition. He is married on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

These paragraphs must have stemmed from a communication of some sort from Woolrich, who this time chose to shave a full seven years off his age, but the point of the joke remains elusive. Clearly the macabre sense of humor that Steve Fisher detected in him back in the thirties was still going strong.

The nonprint media were no less kind to Woolrich in 1946. Listening audiences that year were offered sixteen radio plays based on his work, including seven on *Molle Mystery Theatre* and five on *Suspense*, and those pioneers who had already bought their first television set got to see the second live TV drama taken from a Woolrich story. Its title, source, cast and quality are unknown, but he was paid $75 for licensing its performance.

Of the three Woolrich-based movies released during 1946, by far the most rewarding was Universal's version of *The Black Angel*, which I consider the finest film ever adapted from any of his novels even though it resembles its source mainly in spirit. Dan Duryea's character of Marty Blair—gaunt, haunted-eyed, pathetic, an intensely creative man living in a seedy hotel room and torn apart by liquor and loneliness—is the second of the three performances in Hollywood history to capture much of the heart and soul of Woolrich himself. What Woolrich thought of the picture we will see later.

On the last day of 1946, the paperback house then most heavily committed to Woolrich published yet another of his story collections, *Borrowed Crime* (Avon Murder Mystery Monthly #42, 1946), under the Irish byline. The volume consisted of four novelettes, none commonly reprinted since: "Borrowed Crime" (1939), the wretched "The Cape Triangular" (1938), the Noir Cop masterpiece "Detective William Brown" (1938), and the perfect Woolrich title "Chance" (1942, as "Dormant Account"). As a paperback, and arguably not a legitimate book at all but just a magazine issue, it was reviewed nowhere—except by Anthony Boucher. "The excellence of the Woolrich-Irish pulp novelettes is by now so widely recognized," he told readers of his *Chronicle* column, "that the mere announcement of this latest collected volume should send you scurrying to a newsstand." Those who didn't take his advice had cause to kick themselves later, for *Borrowed Crime* sank quickly from sight and is now one of the priciest of Woolrich titles.

Financially 1946 was the best year Woolrich ever had. According to his records, he made just under $6,000 from short fiction, a staggering $38,500 from sale of movie rights, just over $9,500 from novels, almost $7,000 from radio, and $75 from TV. The grand total of slightly less than $61,000 would be worth well over half a million today. His life of course remained unaffected by the money and each day continued to be like every other day as, caged with his mother in those rooms at the Hotel Marseilles, he sat in front of his Remington Portable and gave form to his visions of the darkness.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

In the end pages of his 1946 anthology *The Fourth Mystery Companion*, A.L. Furman had listed among Woolrich's titles a *Waltz in Black*. No book by that name was ever published. But from this information, which must have been provided by Woolrich himself, we can deduce that his single novel to come out in 1947 was originally planned to appear under his own byline, as an entry in the Black Series. For whatever reasons, the novel was published instead by Lippincott, early in January 1947, as a Story Press book by William Irish: *Waltz into Darkness.*

Lippincott's advertising copywriters hailed it as his first mainstream novel, as if it had nothing to do with crime or suspense and as if what he'd written in the Jazz Age had been Westerns or science fiction or something. But *Waltz* was certainly a departure for Woolrich in several respects. It was his longest novel, one of his most ambitious, and one of the few that is not episodic in nature and does not stem from an earlier magazine tale. Unlike any other novel he had yet written but in line with a number of his pulp adventure sagas, its setting is in the nineteenth century. It was his only book since the 1932 *Manhattan Love Song* to center on the *noir* theme that readers for over half a century have identified with James M. Cain: a man's enslavement by a woman.

Destroying Angels had dominated at least two of Woolrich's previous suspense novels, but they were sympathetic characters next to the temptress of *Waltz into Darkness*, who is much closer to the treacherous females common in forties *film noir* and indeed is portrayed as literally diabolical in her amorality. There is a link, however, which connects her with Alberta in *The Black Angel* and Julie in *The Bride Wore Black* and *Manhattan Love Song*'s Bernice. Woolrich denies all of them any physical or sexual aspect of the sort Cain lavished on his earthy and sluttish *belles dames sans merci*. Likewise Louis Durand of *Waltz* shares a common bond with Wade in *Manhattan Love Song* and several of the male victims in *The Bride Wore Black* and *The Black Angel*. Each is an acolyte worshipping at the altar of love, obsessed by a woman who is God the Mother, unknowable, implacable and cruel as life. As Woolrich couldn't shake free from his mother's grip, neither can Durand from the grip of *la femme fatale*. As we live inside his skin, aching and agonizing and dying with him, we scream at this craven masochist to break with the woman, renounce his faith, save his life and sanity. He can't hear us. He hears only the goddess' voice.

The novel has no dedication but there is an epigraph, from the English Victorian poet Algernon Charles Swinburne:

> If one should love you with real love
> (Such things have been,
> Things your fair face knows nothing of
> It seems, Faustine). . . .

Faustine had been the name of the female bloodsucker in Woolrich's ludicrous 1939 pulper "Vampire's Honeymoon."

And so the curtain rises.

> The soundless music starts. The dancing figures appear, slowly draw together. The waltz begins.

It's a bright morning in old New Orleans, May 20, 1880. Thirty-seven-year-old Louis Durand, partner in a thriving coffee import business, is dressing to meet his bride, whom he has never seen. Julia Russell—a plain but pleasant-looking woman judging from the photograph she had sent him during their correspondence through a lonely hearts club—is to arrive on the steamboat from St. Louis in a few hours, and to marry him that evening.

> So this was the bargain he had made with love, taking what he could get, in sudden desperate haste, for fear of getting

> nothing at all, of having waited too long, after waiting fifteen years, steadfastly turning his back on it. . . .
>
> And suddenly, one day, the cumulative loneliness of fifteen years, held back until now, overwhelmed him, all at one time, inundated him, and he turned this way and that, almost in panic.
>
> Any love, from anywhere, on any terms. Quick, before it was too late! Only not to be alone any longer.

His servants Tom and Sarah, two of the most attractively drawn blacks in Woolrich's work, are one with him in his newfound happiness. A man alone, Sarah tells him, "ain't a whole man at all, he's just a shadow walking around with no one to cast him."

When the *City of New Orleans* docks at the Canal Street pier, dozens of passengers descend the gangplank. She is not among them. For just long enough to seize our hearts, Woolrich lets us think this is an annihilation story. Then she is there, the butterfly touch of a hand on Louis' shoulder. She is young and golden and exquisitely beautiful, not at all like her photograph. She introduces herself and begs Durand to forgive her for sending him an aunt's picture instead of her own—she didn't want him to love her for the wrong reasons, she says—and they go off to be married. First touch of unease: she had sent him her finger size but the wedding ring doesn't fit her quite right. There is a lavish supper party at Antoine's, the most elegant restaurant in New Orleans, and the newlyweds waltz in each other's arms.

> Around and around and around, then reversing, and around and around once more, the new way. The tables and the faces swept around them, as if they were standing still in the middle of a whirlpool, and the gas-lights flashed by on the walls and ceilings like comets.

After the dance they slip away to the home Durand has furnished for them, and their life together begins. Next touch of unease: she doesn't seem to recognize the bedroom wallpaper that she had described in letters to him as her favorite pattern.

More of these hints accumulate in the next few chapters. Durand's bride drinks his special coffee avidly, although in a letter she had said that she hated coffee. She seems indifferent to the canary she brought with her from St. Louis, and the bird is soon found strangled to death in its cage. Only his bride could have killed the inoffensive creature, but Durand says nothing about the incident. He isn't even concerned when he learns that Julia doesn't have the key to the trunkful of clothes that came with her on the boat. The only thing that does upset him for a few minutes is when he comes home from the office one afternoon and catches her sitting in a chair with her knees crossed! Woolrich devotes a long and windy paragraph to explaining that in 1880 Louis' reaction was not "laughable prissiness." I doubt that many readers were convinced.

Then one day he mistakenly opens a letter addressed to Julia, from her sister Bertha in St. Louis, complaining that Julia had never once written since leaving for New Orleans. That evening he pressures his bride to write Bertha at once, and she does, and it goes out in the morning mail. On the same morning Julia inveigles Durand into taking her to his bank with him and changing his individual savings account into a joint form on which she can write checks at will. Several days later Durand receives a letter of his own from Bertha Russell, written in anguish and fear. The letter she was sent by Julia, she says, was "in the handwriting of a stranger," and she demands to know what has happened to her sister. Finally Durand sees the truth. He rushes to the bank, but too late: his bride is gone and so is $30,000 of his money. Louis is devastated.

> He stumbled over to the wall, pressed his face against it, arms straight up over his head as if he were trying to claw his way upward to the ceiling. His voice seemed to come from his stomach, through rolling drums of smothered agony—that were the weeping of a grown man.
>
> "I want her back again. I want her back. I'll never rest until I find her."
>
> "What you want her back again for?" [Sarah] demanded.
>
> He turned slowly.
>
> "To kill her," he said through his clenched teeth.

For the next several months Durand hunts his bride through the New Orleans nightworld, outside the theaters, in the brothels, along the streets of the French Quarter during Mardi Gras. (Don't ask how Mardi Gras happened to fall so late in the year, because Woolrich certainly didn't.) One masked woman during the bacchanal almost pays for her vague torchlight resemblance to Julia with her life. When Durand consults the police, he learns that they are helpless: even if the woman he married wasn't the real Julia Russell, she was and still is his lawful wife, and did nothing illegal when she drained his account. As for the fate of the real Julia, who boarded the steamer in St. Louis and never disembarked at New Orleans, the police commissioner advises Durand that "Anglo-Saxon common law, which governs us here," bends over backward to protect the innocent. In fact Louisiana is the only state in the Union whose legal system is *not* based on English common law but rather on the French Code Napoleon, but since when did Woolrich bother to do research? Durand leaves police headquarters knowing that the authorities will take action only if he brings them proof that the real Julia was murdered by her substitute.

He journeys upriver to St. Louis, introduces himself to the grieving Bertha Russell, explains the situation, and joins forces with her in an alliance for vengeance. Together they engage private investigator Walter Downs to retrace Julia's last journey and find evidence of her fate. Their choice of detective seems at the time a wise one. Downs is a dour and haunted-looking man, with a strong tendency to become obsessed by whatever job he accepts, to pursue his quarry to the depths of hell. "I cannot promise you I will succeed in solving it," he tells Durand. "I can promise you one thing and one only: I will never quit it again until I do solve it." How such iron resolve is possible for a by no means wealthy man Woolrich doesn't explain. The *City of New Orleans* happens to be docked in St. Louis at this time, preparing for its next voyage downriver. Downs travels part of the way with Durand, questioning the captain and the steward and whoever else might have noticed Julia on the early part of the journey. When he discovers that no one saw her after the vessel's first port of call, which is Cape Girardeau, in southeastern Missouri, Downs leaves the steamer. "You will see me again some day, sooner or later," he promises Durand. "I can't say when, but you will surely see me again some day."

Durand returns to New Orleans, closes up the house where his love died, goes on a long trip in an effort to forget. In May of 1881, in a bar in Biloxi, Mississippi, he happens to make the acquaintance of a certain Colonel Harry Worth, late of the Confederate Army, a liquor-sodden lecher with a taste for double entendres. Worth invites Durand for dinner with himself and his "fiancée," a certain Miss Castle. Durand gets to the restaurant late, approaches their curtained booth and, while still several feet away, catches a glimpse of the colonel's woman. The hand of fate descends. It is she. "Julia, the killer. The destroyer of his heart." He lurches out of the restaurant like a drunk. What has intoxicated him? "Wine of hate, ferment of the grapes of wrath."

He goes back to the hotel where "Miss Castle" is staying, slips into her room and waits for her in the dark. From behind a paneled screen he watches her prepare for bed, smoke a petite cigar in her knickers—is there no limit to this woman's depravity?—and then he steps out and gently lays a hand on her shoulder. She is terrified, knows he is going to kill her, but keeps cool, disrobing for him, all but daring him to crush the life out of the body he once loved. And he can't do it. Instead, he tells her, he will take her back to New Orleans to stand trial for the real Julia's murder. At this point she tells him the story of her life, or at any rate a story. It's straight out of Dickens, a tale of having been born without a name, of having been laid on the steps of a foundling home in a basket, of childhood poverty and abuse, and of having eventually chosen to make her way in the world by preying on foolish and lecherous men. Of all those men, she swears she loved only him. She admits that she and her male accomplice Billy had been on the *City of New Orleans* with the real Julia Russell, that they had learned she was going to meet and marry a rich man she had never seen, but desperately insists that it was Billy alone who had thrown Julia overboard in the night to her death. She had broken with Billy over the murder, had had nothing to do with him after meeting and marrying Durand, and had run out on the marriage, taking Durand's savings with her, only because Billy had come back into her life and threatened to kill her for double-crossing him. At the end of her recital she offers Durand her body.

Their coupling is not described but its effect on Durand is stunning, overpowering, almost like a religious experience. It is morning and he is in love again.

> The cooling silvery-green of low-burning night lights was no longer there. Ladders of fuming Gulf Coast sunlight came slanting through the slits of the blinds, and formed a pattern of stripes across the bed and across the floor. And above this, there was a reflected brightness, as if everything had been newly whitewashed; a gleaming transparency.

But their ecstasy dissolves into alarm once they realize that the obsessed Walter Downs will soon have discovered enough to cause the woman's arrest for the real Julia Russell's murder. Durand and his bride quit Biloxi hastily and go on the run, following the curve of the Gulf Coast, becoming another of the Fugitive Couples with which *noir* literature and films abound.

Their next stop is Mobile, Alabama, where they rent a house and try to start life over. By this time Durand is as hopelessly entangled as a fly in a spider's web.

> "Now I only want a wife like you. With yesterday's leftover dye still on her cheeks. With the tip of her bent knee poked brazenly through her dressing gown. With cigar ashes on the floor about her. Jeering at a man in their most private moments, egging him on, then ridiculing him, rather than swooning limp into his arms. . . . I only want you; bad as you are, heartless as you are, exactly as you are, I only want you."

This is *amour fou* as its craziest, and Woolrich constantly describes Durand in terms of an animal caught in a net. ("And her arms dropped, closed over him like the trap they were.") But on another level of imagery, less obsessive, more subtle, Woolrich evokes the unbearable suffering of his protagonist in the language of chalice, Calvary, the cross, resurrection—the language of the Gospel stories of the sufferings of Jesus—just as he'd employed the same language to describe the last agony of Paul Stapp in the 1938 classic "Three O'Clock."

Time passes and the hand of fate once more descends. One morning while his nameless bride is out shopping, Durand takes a stroll along the dockside. On the piers he runs into none other than Walter Downs, who has learned the truth and been pursuing the couple relentlessly for months. In one of the novel's most suspenseful sequences, Durand first tries to fire the implacable detective and fails ("I'm no longer working for you, I'm working for my own conscience"), then tries to bribe him and fails even worse ("You picked the one private investigator in the whole country, maybe, that once he starts out on something can't leave off again, not even if he wants to"), and finally, when Downs forces his way into their rented house, holds a gun on him.

> "Keep your head, man. You're still not involved. . . . You've been foolish but not criminal so far—Don't, Durand—Stop and think before it's too late. . . ."
>
> . . . . "It's already too late. It's been too late since I first met her. It's been too late since the day I was born. It's been too late since God first created this world."

Surely this woman is *la femme fatale* for Durand in the most literal sense: she is his destiny. He kills Downs in cold blood.

By the time his bride returns home, he's possessed by the horrors, moves and speaks like a zombie. Unfazed, she takes the murder in her stride, tells Durand to wrap the body in one of the rugs and dig a grave for it in the basement, coolly helps him with the arrangements, and afterward gnaws on a joint of cold chicken. They agree that they must leave Mobile at once, move on elsewhere. Before they go there's a harrowing Hitchcockian scene in which Durand, alone in the house, is unexpectedly visited by the rental agent and a new prospective tenant and forced to show them around the place—including the basement with its freshly turned earth.

The fugitives make their desperate way along the Gulf Coast, but now that Durand too is a murderer, they take on the characteristics of the killer lovers in James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity*. They begin to claw at each other. She mocks Durand for having a conscience, uses maternal phrases like "That's a good boy" in speaking to him, as if he were an idiot child. The next crisis comes when their money runs out. Durand slinks back to New Orleans, pays a furtive night visit to his partner in the coffee import house, begs the man to buy Durand out, pay in cash and ask no questions. He is with his bride again, he confesses—"I love her more than life itself"—and for her sake he has killed a man. "Each man's hell is his own," his partner says. Durand brings the money back to her and finds she's been whiling away the time with a deck of cards, trying to learn their futures.

Durand: "And what did I get?"
She: "The ace of spades."

Remembering the fortune-telling scene in *Black Alibi* and the predictions of doom in *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, one suspects that fate is speaking through the cards.

More time goes by. Then a chance newspaper story alerts the couple to danger. Downs' moldering body has been found in the basement of the house in Mobile, and police are hunting the couple who had hastily given up their tenancy three months earlier. They flee once again, still clinging to the Gulf Coast like infants to their mother's breast, until in Pensacola, Florida, once again the money runs out. She refuses to let Durand get a job—"I hate a man that works!"—and instead teaches him how to cheat at cards. The first night he tries it, he is caught and disgraced and kicked bodily out of the gaming house. His bride reacts with contempt for his clumsiness. They have a vicious argument. "You're no good to me at all," she screams at him. "You and your romantic love. Faugh!" The fight ends when he slaps her and knocks her to the floor. "It's a wonder you were man enough to do that much," she says. "I didn't think you had it in you." She moves out of his bedroom but they stay together.

We are about fifty pages from the end of the novel, and before long the little hints of unease begin to accumulate as they had in the book's early chapters, and we begin to understand why she doesn't simply dump this love-smitten goop and strike out on her own again. She has reestablished contact with her accomplice Billy, sold the jewelry Durand gave her and used the money to reactivate an old lapsed life insurance policy in her favor that Durand had executed in the honeymoon time. Then one evening she screams that there are rats in the kitchen, and sends Durand out to buy a tin of poison. Not long afterward, Durand becomes deathly ill. The final scene in which, more dead than alive, he stumbles through the streets in desperate search of a doctor are reminiscent of the poisoned headsman's predawn lurch through Paris in Woolrich's 1939 classic "Men Must Die." And then when Durand is at the point of death, his still maniacally powerful love for the woman miraculously kindles in her a spark of real love for him, and frantically she tries to undo what she has done. For the first time in her life she cares for someone, and the agony of caring is worse than the agony of the poison in Louis' belly. "Louis," she asks him at the end, "is this what it's like? Does it always hurt so?" "It hurts," he replies, "but it's worth it. It's love."

The novel's religious dimension climaxes on the last page with a paraphrase of a famous line from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, but with the roles reversed, she the worshipper, he the divinity: "Oh, Louis, Louis! I have loved you too late. Too late have I loved you. . . . And this is my punishment."

> The soundless music stops. The dancing figures wilt and drop. The Waltz is done.

If *Waltz into Darkness* is no one's favorite Woolrich novel, there are reasons. Its set pieces of suspense generate terror as magically as ever, but there are few suspense sequences for a book this long. Its most striking descriptive passages are so vivid we see the scene as we read. ("An occasional gas lamppost twinkled like a lime-colored glowworm down the vista of trees. A church steeple sliced like a stubby black knife upward against the brickdust-tinted sky. . . .") But these too are relatively rare considering the novel's length. Woolrich was apparently aiming for the stilted and ponderous tone which he thought appropriate to a story set in the nineteenth century, but he wound up with a farrago echoing those florid silent movie titles to which he'd been exposed in his teens by his grandfather. "You don't know what you do to me. You madden me. Oh, this is no love. This is a punishment, a curse!" moans the man. "Ta ta, lovey mine," mocks the woman, demonstrating her cold cruel heart. Shades of the Theda Bara vamp pictures! "Kiss me, you fool!"

But long before taking young Woolrich to the movies, Grandfather Tarler had introduced the boy to the opera; and if a single word can capture the essence of *Waltz into Darkness*, that word is *operatic*. The mood, the color, the emotional fever, everything is heightened way beyond the pitch of intensity that is commonplace in *noir*. This isn't so much a novel as an opera in prose. Chunks of dialogue that leave us howling on the floor if we imagine people trying to speak them become acceptable if we think of them as being *sung*.

> "Lou, buy me a new dress. All white satin and Chantilly lace. Lou, buy me a great big emerald for my pinkey. Buy me diamond drops for my ears. Take me out in a carriage to twelve o'clock supper at some lobster palace. I want to look at the chandelier lights through the layers of colored liqueurs in a pousse café. I want to feel champagne trickle down my

> throat while the violins play gypsy music. I want to live, I want to live, I want to live! The time is so short, and I won't get a second turn—"
>
> "Make her love me," he pleaded mutely [in another of those Prayers to an Absent God], "as I love her. Open her heart to me, as mine is open to her. If she can't love me in a good way, let it be in a bad way. Only, in some way. *Any* way, at all. This is all I ask. For this I'll give up everything. For this I'll take whatever comes, even the ace of spades."
>
> "Why wait for the night to be further advanced? Oh, spare me the night, Bonny, spare me the night! It is so long—so dark—so lonely—"

Waltz into Darkness is about a man of Edenic innocence, "born to be the natural prey of women," a child-man, with "a heart as easily broken as a woman's," and about his crucifixion on the Calvary of love, and about the miracle of love giving birth to love but too late. What could be more operatic? Its most haunting moments are unforgettable, but the book cries out for a composer to translate its lunatic excess into the language of music. For a Puccini.

Woolrich had never written a novel like that before, but you'd never know it from what contemporary reviewers had to say. The anonymous writer for the Kirkus service called it "an ironical study of crime" in the tradition of Vera Caspary, the author of *Laura* (1943) and other romantic thrillers. *Library Journal* likened it to the historical crime novels of Marie Belloc Lowndes, author of *The Lodger* (1913). "You won't be far wrong," said the *New York Herald-Tribune*'s Will Cuppy, "if you call it a whodunit thrown slightly out of gear . . . and loaded with period color for good measure. It's still a characteristic Irish riddle." Well, hardly!

The unintentionally ludicrous side of the novel may have had something to do with its poor showing in the subsidiary rights market. No studio adapted it into a movie nor any radio series into a drama. No magazine large or small purchased serial rights prior to its book publication, and afterward its only periodical appearance was in the March 1948 issue of *Detective Novel Magazine*, a little-known pulp. No paperback edition came out until seven years after its hardcover release, and that one (Ace pb #D40, 1954) cut more than a third of the text. No publisher contracted to do a tie-in when Francois Truffaut's movie version, *La Sirène du Mississippi (Mississippi Mermaid)*, reached theaters in the late sixties. The only unabridged paperback edition of *Waltz* ever issued in the United States (Ballantine pb #30669, 1983) features a less than evocative cover illustration by the usually superb

Larry Schwinger. The novel has always been popular in countries like Italy and France, where emotional excess is more acceptable.

• • •

When Woolrich had attended Columbia in the early 1920s, one of the stars of the literature faculty was poet-scholar Mark Van Doren (1894–1972). Although Woolrich does not seem to have taken any of Van Doren's courses, they must have known each other informally and had a number of talks about literature. Around the time *Waltz into Darkness* was published, Van Doren happened to see the 1946 movie *Black Angel*, noticed Woolrich's name in the credits as author of the novel on which the film was based, and wrote him a friendly letter, reminding him of their acquaintanceship in Woolrich's student years. On February 2, 1947, Woolrich replied.

> That was the kindest letter you sent me. I don't get very many, and at times it's like writing in a vacuum, you don't know if anyone likes it or not. (For that matter, you don't even know if anyone reads it or not.) So it did me a lot of good; made me want to write again for awhile.

It seems then that by the end of 1946 or the beginning of 1947, Woolrich had begun to burn out. In the next paragraph of the letter, he says: "I'm going to be forty next December. . . ." The old habit of lying about his age was as strong as ever, only now he was claiming he'd been born in 1907! And the old feeling that he was a literary failure was as powerful as ever too.

> I don't like to look back at the Columbia days for that reason; the gap between expectation and accomplishment is too wide. Well, it's too late now, so I'm stuck with it.
>
> Thank you, anyway, very much. I'm the one who's grateful to you. You seem to please so easily.

• • •

Only two new works of short fiction by Woolrich came out during the first half of 1947, but both were among his finest. "The Boy Cried Murder" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, March 1947), better known under its reprint title "Fire Escape," is told in third person but clearly marks the culmination of the suspense thrillers told in first person from the perspective of a young boy which Woolrich had been writing for the pulps since the mid-thirties. The protagonist is Buddy, a twelve-year-old with a fertile imagination and a propensity for making up elaborate whoppers—and getting walloped for them by his parents. One boiling hot July night, the boy slips out the bedroom window of the fifth-floor tenement flat in which he and his struggling mother and father live, and climbs the fire escape to the sixth floor in search of a breeze. Instead, peeping through the narrow bar of window glass beneath an incompletely pulled-down shade, he sees his upstairs neighbors kill a man and prepare to dismember the body with (I'm not making this up) a straight razor. Terrified, and almost caught in the act of spying, Buddy races back down the fire escape. In the morning he tries to tell his parents what he saw, but they refuse to believe him and punish him for his "lie" with an excess of ferocity. In desperation Buddy runs away to the local precinct station and repeats his story, but when it doesn't seem to check out, none of the cops will believe him either. By this time he's made sufficient fuss so that the killers upstairs realize there was a witness to their murder, and set out to dispose of Buddy too, knowing that if he tries to scream for help no one will listen. Woolrich drains the last drop of suspense from this Living Nightmare premise, and unsurprisingly RKO purchased movie rights to the novelette within a few days after it hit the newsstands.

His only other new story of the season appeared in a classic pulp mystery magazine that had been around since before Woolrich's debut as a crime writer. *The Shadow* had been launched by Street & Smith in April of 1931, and for most of its eighteen-year existence each monthly issue was devoted exclusively to a book-length adventure of the black-cloaked slouch-hatted figure whose barking .45s spelled gangdom's doom. The vast majority of these monthly novels were written by one man, the legendary Walter B. Gibson (1897–1985). Wartime paper shortages and declining sales led to a retrenchment in 1943, and *The Shadow* switched from pulp dimensions to the digest-sized format of *EQMM*. When sales after the war continued to slide, Street & Smith changed its name to *The Shadow Mystery Magazine* and its frequency from monthly to bimonthly, reducing the length of the Shadow story that was still its main feature and making room for tales by other writers. The first issue of *Shadow* in its new incarnation was dated February-March 1947 and edited by Babette Rosmond. The next number of the magazine included a novelette by Woolrich. "Death Escapes the Eye" (*Shadow Mystery Magazine*, April-May 1947) is the last story he ever wrote in first person from a woman's perspective, and one of the finest. By this point he had purged his fiction of the pulp elements with which he'd started his mystery-writing career, and without benefit of a single action scene or cardboard gangster or even a single gunshot, he was filling his pages with tormented relationships in a radically insecure universe. "The other night at a party I met my last love again." The narrator is Lizzie Aintree: smart, stylish, single, almost forty, and—like Babette Rosmond who bought this story—the editor of a mystery magazine. Chance or kismet introduces her to wealthy Park Avenue socialite Dwight Billings, and the result is a series of restrained but wrenching emotional confrontations between Lizzie and Billings and between each of them separately and Bernette, Billings' on-again-off-again wife, a mercenary slut by whom he is captivated very much as Louis Durand in *Waltz into Darkness* was obsessed by the demonic female who was his destiny. On the surface nothing happens in the story except that these three people keep falling in and out of love. Just beneath the surface, however, a murder may have been committed. Ultimately this is an oscillation story, but much more quiet and subtle and involving than most of Woolrich's earlier tales of this sort, and more disturbing. In the typical Woolrich oscillation thriller, no matter how badly the viewpoint character was ripped apart by uncertainty as to whether or not the loved one is guilty, the anguish was never permanent and on the last page there was always a yes or no answer. In "Death Escapes the Eye" Woolrich denies us an answer. Not only do we never find out if Billings killed Bernette, we never even learn if she's dead. The deepest kinship of this story is not with the oscillation thrillers but with the stories like 1938's "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" which deal with the inscrutability of the universe. Woolrich leaves us tormented by the possibilities and even more so by the impossibility of knowing the truth. "Isn't love the damndest thing?" Lizzie laughs ruefully near the end. Yes, Woolrich tells us, and so is life.

Magazine readers during the first half of 1947 were also offered reprints of four earlier Woolrich tales, two good ones chosen by Fred Dannay and a pair of clinkers resurrected by Avon. The February *EQMM* presented the 1938 Noir Cop story "You Take Ballistics" and the April issue included the 1939 classic "Men Must Die," better known as "Guillotine" but retitled "Steps Going Up" by Dannay, who had a compulsion for changing the names of the stories he bought. Avon printed the feeble but popular "What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear" (1944) in the May *Rex Stout's Mystery Monthly* as "The Body of a Well-Dressed Woman," and brought back the abominable "Wild Bill Hiccup" (1938) in the third number of a new periodical, *The Avon Western Reader*, which died on the newsstands.

Later that year came the publication of the last new stories of Woolrich's major period, one a gem of *noir*, the other indifferent. The protagonist of "One Night in Barcelona" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, Fall 1947) is Maxi Jones, expatriate American jazz band leader, known in Spain as *El Rey de los Saxofonos*. He is in his Barcelona hotel room one evening, having dinner before going to the club to perform, when an uninvited visitor knocks on his door. The intruder's name is Freshman and he's a cop from the American South with an extradition warrant in his pocket. In a flashback sequence we learn that Jones is a fugitive from Tennessee justice, having fled to Spain three years ago rather than face trial for having burned a young man and woman to death. Jones swears that he was framed by the dead woman's politically powerful husband, who caught his wife with another man and cremated the two in their love nest. He also insists that if Freshman returns him to Tennessee he won't be put on trial but burned alive by a lynch mob. What he doesn't tell Freshman, and what Woolrich never explicitly tells us but clearly expects us to see just as Freshman sees it, is that Maxi Jones is black. Freshman refuses to be swayed from his duty but, after a roll of the dice to test the will of fate, he agrees to let Jones have "one last night" of music before they start back. At the club an anonymous woman slips Jones a note inviting him to a late tryst at her apartment, and Freshman consents to allow Jones a last moment of love too. At their rendezvous, fate rolls the dice again. During foreplay or afterplay (Woolrich doesn't specify which) the woman suffers a heart attack and dies on the spot, and Jones seizes the chance to escape being burned alive for two deaths he had nothing to do with by framing himself for a third. He plunges a butcher knife into the woman's body, confesses on the spot and demands that Freshman turn him over to the Spanish police. The moral about American justice hardly needs emphasis. There are several more plot twists before the fadeout, but the central theme is the same as in "Three O'Clock" and "Men Must Die" and *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*: confrontation with the certain knowledge of one's own horrible and inevitable death. We can hardly help wondering how Woolrich would have expanded this powerful novelette to book length if his own fate had given him the time.

"Death Between Dances" (*Shadow Mystery Magazine*, December 1947-January 1948) was apparently intended for the *Saturday Evening Post* or one of the glossy women's magazines. It begins and ends at a Saturday night country-club dance and unfolds in the hour or so between the two occasions on which the band plays that old standard "The Object of My Affections." The setting may remind long-memoried readers of the opening scene in Woolrich's 1940 "One Last Night" but the true affinity of this story is with his 1937 short-short "Waltz." Sunny Brainard, naively romantic at age eighteen, has come to the dance intending to leave early, abandoning her wealthy widower father and her much older sister Jane whose heart was broken by a man years ago, and to run off with a strange new man who's come into her life. When she reaches the hunting lodge where she's to meet her lover, she finds him shot to death. Tom Reed, the true-blue local who loves Sunny dearly and has followed her to the remote cabin, rearranges the evidence to suggest suicide. They go back to the club in their separate cars and eventually, just as at every other Saturday night dance, the music stops and everyone goes home. By then Sunny knows that the murderer is her sister, and the implication is that the dead man is the same man who had broken Jane's heart a dozen years before. How she knew Sunny was going to elope, how she reached the cabin first or even knew where the place was, Woolrich doesn't bother to explain. In a story without emotional charge, these flaws are deadly.

At the end of the year, Woolrich's 1938 classic "After-Dinner Story" was reprinted yet again, this time in *Alfred Hitchcock's Fireside Book of Suspense* (Simon & Schuster, 1947), a hardcover anthology almost certainly edited in fact by the publisher's regular mystery editor Lee Wright. Hitchcock didn't choose the stories in the book and for all we know didn't even read them, but the conjunction of the two names in one volume was the first link between these doom-haunted soul-brothers who were forging their bleak visions each in his own medium. It was not, of course, to be the last.

If 1947 was one of Woolrich's least prolific years, it was also, thanks again to Hollywood, one of his most profitable. His income added up to more than $56,000, the second highest figure in his career: $3,400 from short fiction, $36,500 from sale of movie rights, a bit over $12,000 from novels, a bit over $4,000 from licensing radio plays based on his material. Financially he was still in peak form, but by the end of the year he had all but stopped writing. The discouragement he'd mentioned in his letter to Mark Van Doren had hardened into a semipermanent condition. His fifteen-year spurt of creative energy was over.

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By this time his former pulp colleague Steve Fisher was enjoying a lucrative and prolific career in Hollywood as a screenwriter. He worked in all sorts of genres, but the success of *I Wake Up Screaming* as both a novel and a movie had led to his being hired to script a number of *films noirs*, such as MGM's *Lady in the Lake* (1947), based on the Raymond Chandler novel, and Columbia's *Dead Reckoning* (1947). Around the end of 1947 Fisher was signed by Monogram Pictures to adapt Woolrich's haunting 1938 novelette "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" for a B quickie. The technical challenges of the assignment were next to impossible since, as we've seen, Woolrich had filled the story with chaotic ambiguities and had deliberately left the ending unresolved. In his memoir "Cornell Woolrich: I Had Nobody" (*The Armchair Detective*, April 1970), which is wrong on several factual points but sound in general outline, Fisher described his problem and its solution.

> Now Cornell Woolrich did now and then have one fault as a story-teller. He could have easily corrected it, but just didn't really care enough to bother. It stemmed from his work habits. Sitting in that hotel room he wrote at night, continuing through until morning, or whenever the story was finally

> completed. He did not revise, polish, and I suspect did not even read the story over once it was committed to paper. For that reason (he admitted to me) by the time he was near the end he was almost exhausted and often closed them off abruptly, with little or no hint as to the final fate of his characters. . . .
>
> But a screenwriter is obliged to have a climactic, understandable ending for his picture. "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" didn't have one. It ended with the hero in death row, awaiting execution, and no solution at all to the mysterious things that had happened to him. So I went to New York to try to persuade Woolrich to give me an ending we could film.
>
> Well, for one thing, even though I had come all that way, the closest I could get to him was the telephone. He was not permitted [by his mother] to leave the hotel room to meet me in person, and what he said was: "Use the ending you had on *I Wake Up Screaming*."
>
> I winced. The character in that novel was tall, skinny, red-haired, wore a derby, and talked in a downbeat nasal twang. Even his name had an eery resemblance. It was Ed Cornell.
>
> However Woolrich bore no malice, and I got the gist of what he meant. I invented an ending where the poor man who late one night threw his shoes out the window at a yowling cat, and through circumstances following that was now on death row, was finally saved in a scene where it is revealed that a homicide detective had framed him to get him out of the way. The cop, you see, had the hots for the hero's wife.
>
> It worked.

• • •

The normal time lag of from nine months to a year between the sale of a mystery novel and its publication prevented the readers of 1948 from understanding that Woolrich had dried up. A new story collection, two new novels, four more reprints in *EQMM*, another appearance in an anthology nominally edited by Alfred Hitchcock ("The Night Reveals," in *Fear and Trembling*, Dell pb #264, 1948), three new movies based on his fiction (including Monogram's *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*), four sixty-minute radio dramas on the newly expanded *Suspense* and others elsewhere on the dial—these hardly seemed the signs of a lean year. How many noticed that not a single new short story by Woolrich came out during 1948, or that the two novels were the only fresh items in the catalogue? His financial returns remained healthy too: close to $2,500 from short fiction, $35,000 from Hollywood, more than $8,000 from novels, $3,600 from radio, for a total of slightly over $49,000. It takes a while before creative trouble shows up on income statements.

The first of his three hardcover titles to appear that year was *Dead Man Blues*, another William Irish collection, released by Story Press/Lippincott in February. It consisted of seven tales: "Guillotine" (1939, as "Men Must Die"), "The Earring" (1943, as "The Death Stone"), "If the Dead Could Talk" (1943), "Fire Escape" (1947, as "The Boy Cried Murder"), "Fountain Pen" (1945, as "Dipped in Blood"), "You Take Ballistics" (1938) and "Funeral" (1937, as "Your Own Funeral"). Since four of the seven had already been reprinted in *EQMM*—indeed the last story in the book, retitled "That's Your Own Funeral," was in the issue of February 1948, the same month the collection itself was published—it's clear that Woolrich and Whit Burnett were again relying heavily on Fred Dannay's taste in deciding which of the Woolrich pulpers should be enshrined in hardcover. Unfortunately not all of the chosen seven were among his best, and a number of reviewers were unhappy with the choices. "I'd guess that only the most devoted admirers would read all of it," said the *Chicago Sun* critic James Sandoe, whose pioneering 1946 lecture on *noir* literature had dealt with Woolrich so perceptively. The *New York Times Book Review*'s Isaac Anderson was less fussy: "The short stories in this collection are all of such superlative quality that one hesitates to select any one of them as the best. Our own favorite is 'Fire Escape.'" At least that was indeed one of the gems of the volume. The collection has been reprinted only once, in a digest-sized paperback (Mercury Mystery pb #135, 1949) with "If the Dead Could Talk" omitted for reasons of space.

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In mid-March, about six weeks after *Dead Man Blues* came out, the firm of Rinehart & Co., a descendant of the Farrar & Rinehart house which had published *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, released *Rendezvous in Black*, the first new entry in the Black Series since 1944's *The Black Path of Fear* and the first book of any sort since 1944 to have the Cornell Woolrich byline on its spine. On the surface, *Rendezvous* looks suspiciously like a rewrite of *The Bride Wore Black* with the sexes reversed, and at least one critic (Howard Haycraft, author of the monumental 1941 study of the genre, *Murder for Pleasure*) complained about the similarity in his review. But if we examine *Rendezvous* more closely it becomes evident that Woolrich wasn't simply dressing up old merchandise and passing it off as new, the way he was to do in the fifties with distressing frequency, nor even trying to close the dark circle, so to speak, by returning to the leitmotifs of his first Black book in this his last. For all its strengths, *The Bride Wore Black* had also suffered from countless weaknesses, and I've suggested before that some of Woolrich's subsequent novels read as though he were aware of the blunders in *The Bride* and determined to correct them. *Rendezvous* is best understood as *The Bride* the way it should have been. With the explanation of the serial murders presented at the beginning so that our response has some basis in events. With a genuine Noir Cop rather than a cipher like Lew Wanger in the role of the hunter stalking the killer through the years. With a wealth of heart-stopping suspense and emotional anguish instead of the cool objective prose of *The Bride*. With the forces of chance and fate kept in perfect creative balance. With a strong and straightforward climax, leaving out all the monkey tricks of plot manipulation that made the last pages of *The Bride* so unpalatable. *Rendezvous* is far from a perfect book—there are too many mechanically written scenes and far too many ridiculous holes in the continuity—but on the visceral level where Woolrich's work stands or falls, it's a masterful performance.

There is of course no dedication, just a motto, this time from John Donne:

. . . for now mine end doth haste.
I run to death, and death meets me as fast.

Did Woolrich believe he was dying, or was he thinking of the death of his talent? The first chapter, "Parting," introduces us to another of those Frank Capra small towns, and to Johnny Marr, a lonely and moody and nondescript young man. Only one person makes his life worth going on with. Her name is Dorothy, a name which comes from Greek roots and means gift of God.

> They had a date at eight every night. If it was raining, if it was snowing; if there was a moon, or if there was none. . . .
> They had their date always at the same place, outside the drugstore down by the square. There was a little corner of the lighted showcase there that belonged to them—that part where, if you stood before it, the powders and the toilet waters were at your back. Not the part where the boxes of chocolates were, tied up in crimson and silver ribbons. Nor yet the part where the scented soaps were, displayed in honeycombed boxes and looking like colored easter eggs. No, only that far end where the powders and the toilet waters were. . . . That was their place, right there. The reflectors at the back of the windows, striking through the flasks and bottles, made little sunbursts of amber, gold and chartreuse green. . . . How often he had stood there, when it wasn't quite eight yet, eyes oblivious of everything else around him, whistling a snatch of tune upward at the stars. Tapping his

> foot lightly, not in impatience, but because his foot was singing love songs to the ground.

On the night of May 31, 1941, he reaches the square a minute or so after eight. Dorothy isn't there, isn't waiting for him outside the drugstore window. Lying in the street near their meeting place is a twisted body, surrounded by jagged pieces of broken glass, her face mutilated. She is dead. A beam has fallen from the sky; or more precisely, a whiskey bottle tossed out of the window of a plane passing overhead in the night. Something dies in Johnny too: his sanity.

> He was still there. He didn't know where to go. He didn't have any place to go. In the whole world there was no place to go but this.
>
> The shock wasn't so bad at first. It was more a numbness than anything else. You couldn't tell. He just stood there quietly, swaying a little at times like a highly volatile weathervane in a breeze that couldn't be felt by others. The showcase behind him and the little projection at the side kept him upright between them. But the harm went in deep. Deep, into places where it could never be gotten out again. . . .
>
> Then presently his eyes struck upward, as if the memory of a drone, the winging-away of death, had briefly recurred to his foundering senses.
>
> He clenched his fist, and shot it up toward there, aimed it toward there. And holding it like that, shook it, and shook it again, and again and again, in terrible promise of implacable accounting to come.
>
> And on that note of dedication, the darkness came down over him.

Every night for the next several months he comes back to the square at 8:00 P.M. and stands in front of the drugstore window till deep into the night, waiting for her. Dreaming to himself. Talking to himself.

> "Once a year," Johnny Marr murmured softly, "once a year it will come around again—for somebody else. . . .
>
> "[I]nto each of their lives, some say, sooner or later, will come a girl. A girl always has to come into the life of each man. *They* won't die, their girls will. When you die, you don't feel anything more. They'll live, they'll feel what it's like. . . .
>
> "Everybody else still has *his* girl. . . . Why haven't I got mine?"

Then he goes away, leaves the little town, and in a little while he's forgotten, it's as if he had never existed.

Over the next several months, each time using a different name but always with the initials J.M., he obtains an office job with first one and then another of the airlines that serve the region, rummaging in the company's files after hours, hunting for a record of the flight from which the bottle fell. And at long last he finds it: the name of the pilot (who turns out to have died in the interim) and the names of each of the five passengers on a certain chartered flight to a certain North Woods hunting lodge. Five men, one of whom drunkenly tossed a whiskey bottle out the plane window into the darkness.

> *Garrison, Graham.*
> *Strickland, Hugh.*
> *Paige, Bucky.*
> *Drew, Richard R.*
> *Ward, Allen.*

In less than fifteen pages Woolrich has set the stage for this emotion-packed reworking of *The Bride Wore Black*. His prose indeed is so intense and involving that very few readers are cool-headed enough to pull up short and say: "Whoa! Who ever heard of a plane with windows a passenger can open in flight?" John Ball (b.1911), world-famous author of *In the Heat of the Night* (1965) and other novels, was a licensed pilot in the forties and has a large collection of technical manuals from the period. Knowing that Woolrich tended to make up facts out of whole cloth, I nevertheless took the precaution of asking Ball whether a plane such as Woolrich described might have existed—and was startled to learn from him that it could and did. But even though a few models of small charter planes were equipped with openable windows in the forties, I'm still convinced that Woolrich never researched the point but rather hit upon truth by dumb luck, and also that even if no such plane model had ever existed, *Rendezvous in Black* would remain one of the most powerful suspense novels ever written.

The extremely short second chapter, "The First Rendezvous," opens after the funeral of Jeanette Garrison, the lovely young wife of Graham Garrison. She had grazed her leg on a nail in the front doorway of their home and died of tetanus on May 31. Her husband, a well-to-do young businessman, is devastated by her sudden and arbitrary death.

> He was alone now. The way he wanted to be. Even in grief, it's better to be alone than with someone else.
>
> He cried a little, first. . . . In a subdued, stifled way, head within his arms. Then that was over. He raised his head, and presently his eyes had dried of themselves. He sat thinking of her for awhile. . . .

> So sudden. So sharp. So swift.
>
> It hurt much worse, even, than the crying had. It would never stop, either. It would always go on hurting, because he would always go on thinking of her.

To distract himself he starts reading the heap of condolence cards that have come in the mail. Among them is one that is unsigned.

Now you know what it feels like.

Sensing a connection between the card and Jeanette's death, Garrison calls the police.

The detective assigned to the case is Cameron, a strange bird indeed. Preternaturally thin, haggard-looking, foul-smelling, a living corpse in a wrinkled suit—if a movie had been made from this novel around the time it was published, the perfect actor for the part would have been John Carradine. Investigation soon convinces Cameron that someone, for some reason, inserted a poisoned nail in the Garrisons' doorway in precisely the position where it would scratch Jeanette's leg and inevitably kill her. (This of course is a lineal descendant of the Bizarre Murder Methods Woolrich dreamed up for his pulpers. Whatever plausibility it may have goes down the tubes once you ask yourself how in the world it could have been rigged to kill her precisely on May 31. Few readers can detach themselves from the emotional torment sufficiently to ask that question.) Unfortunately Cameron can't convince his superiors that the woman was murdered and he is ordered to drop the case.

Chapter Three, "The Second Rendezvous," takes place on May 31, 1947, in the same anonymous metropolis where the Garrisons had lived. Prosperous Hugh Strickland and his wife Florence are hosting an elaborate party at their mansion, but the gaiety is marred by an uninvited guest: Esther Holliday, Strickland's ex-mistress, who is furious because he has cut off the blackmail money he'd been paying her. In a tense scene in the middle of the crowded ballroom, Strickland tries to placate Esther without letting Florence so much as see him talking to her. He succeeds in temporarily buying her off with a check but knows that the only way he'll ever have any peace is to kill her. After the party he makes an excuse to his wife, goes to Esther's apartment, finds her asleep in her bed, takes off his belt, starts lashing her—and discovers to his horror that he's been whipping a corpse. Her neck has been broken. There is a note lying in the bedroom.

Now how do you like it, Mr. Strickland?

Terrified, blubbering like a child, Strickland slinks back home and confesses everything to Florence, who soothes him and holds him to her breast, tells him that she had known about the affair for years, and puts away the anonymous note for safekeeping in the event Strickland is suspected of the murder himself.

The detective assigned to the case happens to be Cameron, who visits Strickland and apparently accepts his story that he'd broken with Esther long ago and hadn't seen her for more than a year. The morning after that interview, just when he thinks the danger is over, Strickland awakens to find deep red scratch marks on the backs of his hands—the kind of marks that a woman might have inflicted on a man who was breaking her neck. The scene echoes Woolrich's Living Nightmare stories like "C-Jag" and "And So to Death." Then horror is piled on horror as Cameron comes back for a second interview and the panic-ridden Strickland insists on wearing gloves in the house. When the detective forces him to take them off and the red marks are bared, it's the beginning of the end of Strickland's life. He is arrested for Esther's murder. Frantically he tries to explain what really happened, and begs Florence to confirm his account by showing Cameron the note he found by Esther's body. "What note, Hugh?" she asks gently. And we know as he knows that she has had her revenge for his infidelity. "She stood there smiling at him; so cool, so charming, so unmoved."

We also know what no one in the novel knows, namely that the real killer is Johnny Marr. But why did he choose Esther as a victim when the odious Strickland quite clearly didn't love either her or anyone else in the world except himself? Certainly he couldn't have anticipated that Florence would frame her husband for the murder. And didn't Cameron notice during his first interview with Strickland that his wrists were unscratched then? If we put aside our emotional involvement and think, the whole episode falls to pieces like dozens of previous Woolrich plots. But of course one of the main functions of the emotional storms he brews on the pages is precisely to keep us from thinking.

Chapter Four, "The Third Rendezvous," takes place during World War II, *before* the Strickland episode. Why does Woolrich violate chronological sequence so blatantly? Because of his views about "the line of suspense," which requires each chapter in this novel to be longer and more emotionally taut than the last, no matter what the cost in terms of common sense. Certainly this war episode is packed with heart-wrenching scenes.

> It was still night, the tailings of night, and she was lying there very quiet, but very wide awake, praying desperately for it to last a little longer. . . .
>
> "Let it stay dark just a little overtime. Keep the day away

> just a little longer. You can do it. I know it has to come sooner or later. But Lord, make it come *slow*."
>
> Praying there flat on her back, eyes looking up at the dim ceiling, just beyond which Mars, the god of war, presumably was hovering low above her, about to tear her in two.

The young woman's husband has been drafted and must report to the induction center at six that morning. It's only after several pages of emotion that we learn who the man is.

> "Good-bye, Bucky," she breathed. "Good-bye, my heart."

And we know which of these two is the more surely marked for death.

While Bucky goes through training at a stateside camp, Sharon Paige gets a job in a defense plant, works herself to exhaustion, becomes friends with her benchmate, a promiscuous young woman known as Rusty. A nondescript young man stops Rusty on the street and strikes up an acquaintance with her. His name, he says, is Joe Morris. He treats the free-and-easy redhead to drinks and dinner, but when she tries to reciprocate by inviting him up to her room, he turns down her advances. All he wants by way of a thank-you, he says, is an introduction to her benchmate Sharon Paige. Momentarily miffed but ever willing to oblige a man, Rusty agrees.

Sharon has not gone out with a man since Bucky went away, not even for a cup of coffee, but Rusty, to whom she owes several favors, leans on her to go out with Joe. And she does, and before long the two are friends. Just friends. Joe is someone she can talk to, share her troubles with, agonize with about the war, share Bucky's letters with. Then the accumulated loneliness of endless time explodes, and she's in love with Joe. A few weeks later an anonymous letter is sent to Bucky at the training camp.

> Every night she meets him on a bench in City Park. You know where City Park is, don't you? Sure you do. Every night she comes running full tilt to meet him. . . . Did she ever run that fast to meet you, soldier? They kiss. Then I see them sit there, for the whole town to see. But they don't even know it, they only have eyes for each other.

Then a few weeks after that comes another letter.

> They don't sit on the bench any longer, soldier. Where do they go? What do they do? . . . They disappear from the time she meets him at 8. Then he brings her back, sometimes at 12, sometimes at 1. Where have they been all that time?

> She's going, soldier, going fast. . . . Kiss your wife goodbye.

Frantically Bucky applies for leave to go back and try to save his marriage but a sadistic commander turns him down. He tries to kill himself in the barracks latrine in the pit of night but is saved by a Jewish buddy. With no other options, he goes AWOL and races madly toward home. The date is May 31. The Clock Race is on. A troop train with priority halts the passenger train on which Bucky is rushing east. He leaps into the darkness, finds a road, hitches a ride, pulls a gun on the driver and takes off in his car. He arrives fifteen minutes too late: she's gone off with Joe.

Once again Woolrich is relying on the emotional power of the situation and his writing to keep our critical faculties numb. Neither Bucky nor anyone else has the faintest idea where Sharon and her lover have gone, but instantly and as if by magic he finds the motor court where Joe has taken her. Again too late. Another unsigned note is lying by her body.

> You can have her back now, soldier.
> Don't say I never gave you anything.

Bucky kisses her dead mouth—"Thank you, Sharon. It was nice loving you"—and kills himself so that their lips come together in death.

The police grapevine brings to the attention of Cameron, in his own bailiwick far away, that this third woman has died on a May 31 in circumstances that included an anonymous note to the man who loved her. Finally sensing a pattern, the detective tracks down Graham Garrison, who has remarried and begun a new life elsewhere. (Cameron: "You're a lucky man, Mr. Garrison." Garrison: "I had my loneliness.") Cameron asks whether Garrison ever knew a man named Bucky Paige, and learns that Paige had been a hunting guide who had accompanied Garrison himself, Hugh Strickland and two other men on a chartered flight to Lake Star of the Woods on May 31, 1941. This conversation takes place not long after Sharon Paige's murder—in other words, still during wartime—and also one year after Strickland's electrocution for the murder of Esther Holliday, which occurred, as we've seen, in 1947! Trying to make sense out of Woolrich's chronology is a one-way ticket to the cracker factory. In any event, by the end of the interview Cameron still doesn't know what's behind the serial killings but he has the names of the two remaining men whose loved ones are the next targets. Meanwhile Johnny Marr has returned to the town where his love died, just for one night, to leave flowers by the headstone which reads:

DOROTHY
I shall be waiting

Chapter Five, "The Fourth Rendezvous," begins with an echo from one of Woolrich's most poignant late romances, "The Clock at the Astor" (1936). Although the city's name is never mentioned, the setting this time is clearly New York. The war is over, and clusters of young men and women are waiting for their dates around the clock in the lobby of the Carlton Hotel. The couple on whom we concentrate meet, go to a play, then to a Chinese restaurant and dance spot, then together in a cab to her place, then he alone in the same cab to his. We are not told their names, but we see that they're being stalked through the night by a nondescript young man.

The next evening, the stalker puts the young woman's escort in his debt by saving him from a prearranged street mugging, and the two exchange names. The escort's is Bill Morrissey. The rescurer's name, so he says, is Jack Munson. In due time they go on a double date and Munson is introduced to Morrissey's girl, whose name is Madeline Drew. Woolrich apparently expects us to remember that the fourth name on the death list was Richard R. Drew, which hasn't been mentioned for almost a hundred pages. Why Johnny Marr has chosen Drew's daughter rather than his wife to be his next victim is never even hinted at.

Slowly and methodically, Munson replaces Bill Morrissey in Madeline's affections until she breaks her fiancé's heart and says goodbye. "Jack, don't hurt me too much, will you?" she begs her new love. Soon afterward, her wealthy father brings her into his study and introduces a visitor, whose name is Cameron. Explaining only that he thinks a man may try to hurt her, Cameron asks if there are any new men in Madeline's life. So deeply in love that she can't conceive of harm from her Jack, Madeline denies having any new boyfriend. That evening she tells Jack of the interview with Cameron.

The next night, Bill Morrissey forces his way into Munson's tiny apartment and beats him up for having stolen Madeline. A battered Munson phones Madeline at the Carlton, where she's waiting for him by the clock. She insists on coming up to his apartment to take care of him. Tension skyrockets but the night ends without incident either murderous or erotic. "Tomorrow will come," Munson tells her. "Tomorrow, the thirty-first of May." What Madeline anticipates in twenty-four hours is physical fulfillment. What is going to happen to her in fact, Munson knows and so do we. Whatever else it is, *Rendezvous in Black* is an encyclopedia of linkages between sex and death.

As soon as Madeline gets home, her parents and Cameron, who have discovered her lies, forcibly pack her off with them to the Drews' palatial retreat on the Jersey shore. The daylight hours of May 31 pass for Madeline in peace and safety and boredom. Then just before supper she slips away from her comfortable prison and makes a beeline in her roadster back to the city, determined to keep her date with Jack, whose other name is death.

> In the gasflame-blue smoothness of the vivid sky, a single splash of silver stood out, the evening star. . . . Its rays seemed to stream, elongated, down toward the earth. . . . Under it, along the luminescent road that reflected the sky's brightness upside down, like a steel rail, her eager little roadster coursed along, throbbing as though it were in love itself. . . .
>
> Hurling like a bullet along its concrete trajectory toward the city, toward the bridges leading into it, toward the supreme rendezvous.

Cameron and her father discover her missing and the clock-race is on again. Of course Cameron has no idea where in the city her lover is living or even what his name is, but Woolrich follows "the line of suspense," blithely leaping over all exposition and letting the detective find Munson's apartment almost at once. Again, just too late. "The face that they'd all looked at under the Carlton clock . . . they would have gagged at, and backed away, run from now. No one would have wanted it now, or even recognized it." This time there is no note, or if there is, Woolrich doesn't bother to mention it. But there is, as fate or chance would have it, a clue to the roots of the murders. Searching the apartment, Cameron finds an old snapshot of a young woman, overlooked by the killer in his flight. Fashion experts examine the hairdo and clothes of the woman in the picture and agree that it was taken no later than the spring of 1941.

Chapter Six, "The Fifth Rendezvous," opens from Cameron's perspective and firmly establishes his credentials in the Woolrich Noir Cop squad. Knowing that the last person on the unknown murderer's hit list is the woman most loved by wealthy businessman Allen Ward, but having no idea who that woman might be, the detective bulldozes his way into Ward's office, flashes his shield, announces that "she" has had a serious accident, and coldly watches the man come apart. Is it my wife? he asks. Cameron is silent. Is it my mother? he asks. Cameron is silent. "Martine. . . . Oh, my God," Ward shudders, and falls to the floor. When Cameron confesses that he made up the accident story, Ward becomes the first victim of Noir Cop tactics to strike back. He socks Cameron in the jaw. "I won't hold that against you," Cameron tells him. "I would have done that to anyone too, who did what I did to you." But, he says, "I had to find out whom you loved most. There was no other way." Then he explains that the woman Ward most loves is scheduled to be murdered on May 31, produces documentation of the previous serial killings, and finally persuades Ward to take him to Martine. On the way, Ward tells him about the woman, who was his first love, his only love, but who had refused to marry him after "something that happened" and in fact had insisted that Ward marry his present wife. When they reach the pleasant house where Martine Jensen lives with a housekeeper-companion, Cameron understands what the "something that happened" was: Martine is totally blind.

The next sequences of *Rendezvous* are eerily reminiscent of the climax of *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, especially since an aura of inevitable destiny had surrounded at least three of the four earlier murders. The police swath Martine's house in an unseen protective cocoon and wait for the approach of the fatal date which is still two weeks away. Ward however frustrates their trap for the killer by concocting an insane scheme of his own to ensure Martine's safety. He arranges with her for the two of them to slip out from under the security net and run off together, first by train to San Francisco, then on a passenger ship to the Orient so that when May 31 comes they'll be far out at sea where death cannot touch them. "They won't have you, love . . . They won't harm you. I'll put the whole world between them and us."

Ward's plan works and they escape the small army of police together. The most harrowing portion of the novel begins, with scenes alternating from his viewpoint to Martine's, as the countdown to May 31 goes on, and every trivial encounter with a functionary, a dining-car steward, a doctor to inoculate them before they board the ship, is fraught with potential terror. During these sequences we never see Johnny Marr and never know whether in fact he's on their trail or has been left behind: paranoia and real fear are indistinguishable. Finally far out at sea the day of reckoning arrives, and every second of that day they die a thousand little deaths. They await the coming of midnight.

> Midnight on a chromium-plated sea. They were together in the semidarkness, their heads pressed together, each with an arm about the other's back, waiting, tense, immobile, breathless, starry-eyed.
>
> They had all the lights out in the suite. But chromium gleams would glide across the walls, and then ebb back again, from the moon-glowing sea outside the windows. . . .
>
> Their hearts go tick, tick, tick, tick, sixty times; not his watch, but their hearts. Together, in perfect time, as one.
>
> His hand drops away from her lips. He raises the little diadem of luminous numbers.
>
> "Now?" she whispers.

> "Now!" At first he whispers it. Then he speaks it. Then he shouts it. "Now! *Now*! NOW!"
>
> They jump to their feet together in the dark.
>
> "Twelve midnight. The first of June. . . . We're safe. It's over. We've won. We've won."
>
> He runs all around the place, touching here, touching there. All the lights flame up, every light in the place, kindling into a blinding blaze of incandescence.
>
> They kiss. . . . They laugh. They kiss, and kiss again, and laugh, and kiss again.
>
> They touch their glasses high above their heads.
>
> "Here's to life!"
>
> "To life! Lovely, lovely life!" . . .
>
> They renew their toast, clink glasses in mid-waltz.
>
> "To life! To the long, long years that lie ahead!"
>
> "To the long, long years we have waiting for us!"

So life begins again for them. They dance away the daylight hours of the first of June, make plans to be married, decide to celebrate their rebirth with a lavish dinner that evening. Then while Martine is alone in their suite, making herself beautiful for her love by sense of touch alone, unease begins to stir again, and she faintly perceives an alien presence in the room with her, and the tension rises to unbearable pitch until the hands are clasped around her throat, "with the bed between them," and the darkness of Martine's life is replaced by another darkness.

How did Johnny Marr manage to stay on their trail over thousands of miles and despite dozens of evasive maneuvers? How did he get on the ship with Martine, and get off again after murdering her? Woolrich's perfunctory and ludicrous explanations, in a recap scene among various detectives, aren't worth the space it would take to summarize them. The bottom line of course is identical to that of the Appointment in Samarra legend: no one can break his date with death. But why did Johnny violate his iron rule and kill this final victim a day late? Well, we are told, he didn't: since the ship had just crossed the International Date Line, what everyone took to be the first of June was really a second May 31! "Didn't anyone tell you that? Didn't you know?" one official barks incredulously. And Woolrich expects us to swallow the notion that, except for the preternatural Mr. Death, no one did. Any reader who consults a geography text will discover that in the real world a ship bound from San Francisco to the Orient would not have gained a second day but would have lost both of them! Whether Woolrich knew that this stunning sequence hung on a gross factual error I'm not at all certain. Had an editor at Rinehart told him, I doubt that he would have cared. Not even the International Date Line may stand in the way of the line of suspense.

The chapter ends with Graham Garrison getting in touch with Cameron to tell him of an incident he had just remembered, something that took place on May 31, 1941, during that charter flight to Lake Star of the Woods. One of the passengers, Garrison recalls, had tossed a liquor bottle out the plane window. It will surprise few readers that the culprit was Hugh Strickland, the one totally repulsive man on board. Under questioning by Cameron, Garrison remembers that the bottle was jettisoned at around dusk. Cameron then uses various charts to determine that the only inhabited area where a bottle thrown at that time from a plane on that flight path could have landed was in one particular small town. There the detective finds Dorothy's mother and learns the story of her death, and of the young man named Johnny Marr who had loved her.

The seventh and final chapter, "Reunion," echoes 1938's "Dime a Dance" and a number of other Woolrich pulpers in which a young woman is staked out as bait to trap an insane serial killer. Cameron enlists a female cop as his sacrificial lamb, has a makeup artist alter her appearance until she is identical to the photo of Dorothy, tests the expert's handiwork by making her mother look at the woman ("I know it was heartless, but there was no other way"), then sends the resurrected Dorothy out to stand every night in front of the drugstore window, waiting, waiting.

> And every night now, where the macabre drugstore cowboy used to stand, there's a ghost-girl waiting for her date. Someone's forgotten girl, waiting for a boy who doesn't come. Eyes always in the semidistance, haunted, sad, peering, straining, pleading for someone who never comes. Standing in the niche where the toilet waters are, patient, forlorn. Eyes that won't meet any other eyes but some certain pair that they have yet to find.

The stage is set for the novel's final explosion of suspense, which ends as it must, with Johnny caught in the trap. "How cruel this is," the policewoman thinks. "Why does it have to be so cruel? Couldn't it be some other way?" He is caught in the middle of a circle in an open field and raked by a hail of bullets flitting across the meadow like fireflies. "Dorothy!" he screams, "in faint, unutterable loneliness, up toward the objective stars. A love cry, a death cry." Cameron looks down at his twisted body. "They've kept their date at last," he says.

The family resemblances between *Rendezvous* and *The Bride Wore Black* are obvious, but the differences, all in the former's favor, should be even more so. There's no such thing as a perfect Woolrich novel, but

Rendezvous is certainly one of his most characteristic, a showcase both for his unique strengths and his equally unique weaknesses. Most reviewers at the time were apparently so caught up in the emotional turbulence he generated on the page that they missed the egregious structural flubs. A prize for least perceptive comment goes to *The New Republic* scribe who called it "gripping, intelligent and beautifully plotted." One out of three ain't good. Howard Haycraft came closer to doing justice to both sides of the Woolrich equation in his brief remarks in the October 1948 *EQMM*, describing *Rendezvous* as "not . . . plausible, but told with the author's usual compulsive skill."

The novel was chosen almost at once as a selection of Walter J. Black's Detective Book Club and was also promptly reprinted in paperback (Pocket Books pb #570, 1949). It then sank from sight for almost two decades, to resurface in softcover around the time a Woolrich's death (Ace pb #H57, 1968). Since that time it has appeared once again in hardcover reprint (Gregg Press, 1979) and in paperback (Ballantine pb #30489, 1982), with an effective Larry Schwinger cover depicting Johnny's visit to his love's grave.

• • •

Rendezvous in Black was the last new work of his major period published under Woolrich's own name. The last major-period work under the William Irish byline was *I Married a Dead Man*, released in July by Lippincott as a Story Press book. Any of its readers who had also read Woolrich's novelette "They Call Me Patrice" in *Today's Woman* two years before must have felt an overpowering sense of déjà vu, for the names and relationships of the characters in the two works are virtually identical and so, up to a point, are the plots. Nevertheless there are huge differences between the novelette and the novel. *I Married a Dead Man* opens in first person, with a prologue that has no counterpart in "They Call Me Patrice" and makes it clear at once that this time there will be no saccharine ending.

> The summer nights are so pleasant in Caulfield. They smell of heliotrope and jasmine, honeysuckle and clover. The stars are warm and friendly here, not cold and distant, as where I came from; they seem to hang lower over us, be closer to us. The breeze that stirs the curtains at the open window is soft and gentle as a baby's kiss. And on it, if you listen, you can hear the rustling sound of the leafy trees turning over and going back to sleep again. The lamplight from within the houses falls upon the lawns outside and copperplates them in long swaths. There's the hush, the stillness of perfect peace and security. Oh, yes, the summer nights are pleasant in Caulfield.

> But not for us.
>
> The winter nights are too. The nights of fall, the nights of spring. Not for us, not for us.
>
> The house we live in is so pleasant in Caulfield. The blue-green tint of its lawn, that always seems so freshly watered no matter what the time of day. The sparkling aerated pinwheels of the sprinklers always turning, steadily turning; if you look at them closely enough they form rainbows before your eyes. The clean, sharp curve of the driveway. The dazzling whiteness of the porch-supports in the sun. Indoors, the curving white symmetry of the bannister, as gracious as the dark and glossy stair it accompanies down from above. The satin finish of the rich old floors, bearing a telltale scent of wax and lemon-oil if you stop to sniff. The lushness of pile carpeting. In almost every room, some favorite chair waiting to greet you like an old friend when you come back to spend a little time with it. People who come and see it say, "What more can there be? This is a home, as a home should be." Yes, the house we live in is so pleasant in Caulfield.
>
> But not for us. . . .
>
> We've fought this thing. How bitterly we've fought it, in every way that we know how. In every way there is. We've driven it away, a thousand times we've driven it away, and it comes back again in a look, a word, a thought. It's there. . . .
>
> There's no way out. We're caught, we're trapped. The circle viciously completes itself each time, and we're on the inside, can't break through. . . . There's no way out. . . .
>
> It's everywhere, it's all the time, it's *us*.
>
> I don't know what the game was. I only know its name; they call it life.
>
> I'm not sure how it should be played. No one ever told me. No one ever tells anybody. I only know we must have played it wrong. We broke some rule or other along the way, and never knew it at the time.
>
> I don't know what the stakes are. I only know we've forfeited them, they're not for us.
>
> We've lost. That's all I know. We've lost, we've lost.

After nine pages of prologue the novel swings into third person and we follow the upheavals in Helen Georgesson's life just as they occurred in "They Call Me Patrice." The story line has already been summarized in connection with the novelette and need not be rehashed here. The few changes Woolrich makes are minimal and functional; for example, in the novel the pregnant Helen isn't married to Steve and thus, when she's mistaken for Patrice Hazzard after the train wreck, she has even more reason to grasp at the new life for herself and her baby that fate or chance has dropped in her lap. Likewise when Steve reenters her new life in Caulfield, the illegitimacy of her child gives him that much more power over her and intensifies her plight.

Woolrich's uncanny word magic and the addition of an existential dimension to the story line transformed a good glossy women's-magazine novelette into one of the most harrowing *noir* novels ever written. Here for example is the scene from "They Call Me Patrice" where Helen pauses in the aisle of the packed train beside the Hazzards' seat.

> The train had already left the Chicago station and she hadn't yet found a seat. She struggled down car-aisle after car-aisle, swaying, jostled from side to side. The aisles were full of standees.
>
> None of the seated men she passed offered her a seat. Their places had been too hard-won on a transcontinental train where anyone who stood, stood for hundreds of miles, through half-a-dozen states.
>
> She'd been too late at the gate in the station, and too late getting on the train. The crowd had spilled past her. She'd been too slow, and too tired, and a little too helpless with her leaden valise. No more cars now. This was the last. Choked from end to end like all the rest. She stopped midway through the car. She could see there weren't any seats vacant.
>
> She set down the valise, and settled herself on its edge, the way she saw so many of the others doing. But it was lower than a seat would have been, and harder to settle down upon. She floundered badly and almost fell. Then when she'd settled down she let her head rest wearily against the nearest seat-back.
>
> The tilt of her head gave her only a downward view into the little patch of floor-space in front of the seat. A pair of man's brogues and a diminutive pair of kid pumps rested side by side. The brogues slung one above the other, the owner's legs coupled at the knee. The pumps were cocked pertly, ankles crossed.
>
> Nothing happened for a moment. Then one of the pumps edged over and dug sharply at the man's ankle. A newspaper rattled. Both brogues swivelled slightly aisleward, as if their wearer's upper body had turned in the seat to take a look.
>
> Then they came down flat and he stood up. He came out through the seat-gap and motioned her in.
>
> "Take my place for awhile."

> She tried to demur with a faint smile.
>
> "No, go ahead," he said heartily. "That's quite all right."
>
> She stood up and accepted the offered seat.

Good solid writing, with the occasional touch of cinematic vividness that is the Woolrich hallmark. Now here's the same scene from *I Married a Dead Man*, with the emotional aspects heightened and the chance-or-fate speculation perfectly integrated into the fabric.

> The train had already ticked off fifteen minutes' solid, steady headway, and she hadn't yet found a seat. The seats were full with holiday crowds and the aisles were full and the very vestibules were full; she'd never seen a train like this before. She'd been too far behind at the dammed-up barrier, and too slow and awkward with her cumbersome valise, and too late getting on. Her ticket only allowed her to get aboard, it gave her no priority on any place to sit.
>
> Flagging, wilting, exhausted, she struggled down car-aisle after car-aisle, walking backward against the train-pull, eddying, teetering from side to side, leaden valise pulling her down.
>
> They were all packed with standees, and this was the last one now. No more cars after this. She'd been through them all. No one offered her a seat. This was a through train, no stops for whole States at a time, and an act of courtesy now would have come too high. This was no trolley or bus with a few moments' running time. Once you were gallant and stood, you stood for hundreds and hundreds of miles.
>
> She stopped at last, and stayed where she'd stopped, for sheer inability to turn and go back again to where she'd come from. No use going any further. She could see to the end of the car, and there weren't any left.
>
> She let her valise down parallel to the aisle, and tried to seat herself upon its upturned edge as she saw so many others doing. But she floundered badly for a moment, out of her own topheaviness, and almost tumbled in lowering herself. Then when she'd succeeded, she let her head settle back against the sideward edge of the seat she was adjacent to, and stayed that way. Too tired to know, too tired to care, too tired even to close her eyes.
>
> What makes you stop, when you have stopped, just where you have stopped? What is it, what? Is it something, or is it nothing? Why not a yard short, why not a yard more? Why just there where you are, and nowhere else?
>
> Some say: It's just blind chance, and if you hadn't stopped

here, you would have stopped at the next place. Your story would have been different then. You weave your own story as you go along.

But others say: You could not have stopped any place else but this even if you had wanted to. It was decreed, it was ordered, you were meant to stop at this spot and no other. Your story is there waiting for you, it has been waiting for you here a hundred years, long before you were born, and you cannot change a comma of it. Everything you do, you have to do. You are the twig, and the water you float on swept you here. You are the leaf, and the breeze you were borne on blew you here. This is your story, and you cannot escape it; you are only the player, not the stage manager. Or so some say.

On the floor before her downcast eyes, just over the rim of he seat-arm, she could see two pairs of shoes uptilted, side by side. On the inside, toward the window, a diminutive pair of pumps, pert, saucy, without backs, without sides, without toes, in fact with scarcely anything but dagger-like heels and a couple of straps. And on the outside, the nearest side to her, A pair of man's brogues, looking by comparison squat, bulky, and tremendously heavy. These hung one above the other, from legs coupled at the knee.

She did not see their faces and she did not want to. She did not want to see anyone's face. She did not want to see anything.

Nothing happened for a moment. Then one of the pumps edged slyly over toward one of the brogues, nudged gently nto it, as if in a deft little effort to communicate something. The brogue remained oblivious; it didn't get the message. It got the feeling, but not the intent. A large hand came down, and scratched tentatively at the sock just above the brogue, then went up again.

The pump, as if impatient at such obtuseness, repeated the effort. Only this time it delivered a good sharp dig, with a bite o it, and on the unprotected ankle, above the armor-like brogue.

That got results. A newspaper rattled somewhere above, as f it had been lowered out of the way, to see what all this unpleasant nipping was about.

A whispered remark was voiced above, spoken too low to be distinguishable by any but the ear for which it was intended.

An interrogative grunt, in masculine timbre, answered it.

Both brogues came down even on the floor, as the legs above uncoupled. Then they swivelled slightly toward the

> aisle, as if their owner had turned his upper body to glance that way.
>
> The girl on the valise closed her eyes wearily, to avoid the gaze that she knew must be on her.
>
> When she opened them again, the brogues had come out through the seat-gap, and the wearer was standing, full-height in the aisle, on the other side of her. A good height too, a six-foot height.
>
> "Take my seat, miss," he invited. "Go ahead, take my place for awhile."
>
> She tried to demur with a faint smile and a halfhearted shake of the head. But the velour back looked awfully good.
>
> The girl who had remained in it added her insistence to his. "Go ahead, honey, take it," she urged. "He wants you to. We want you to. You can't stay out there like that, where you are."
>
> The velour back looked awfully good. She couldn't take her eyes off it. But she was almost too tired to stand up and effect the change. He had to reach down and take her by the arm and help her rise from the valise and shift over.
>
> Her eyes closed again for a moment, in ineffable bliss, as she sank back.

Helen's introduction to Hugh Hazzard and his pregnant wif Patrice, the train wreck while the two women are in the ladies' roon together, Helen's awakening in a luxurious hospital room, her slov realization that she's been wrongly identified as Patrice, her decisio to play along with the deception for her baby's sake, her welcome t the town of Caulfield and the household of Hugh's wealthy and kindl parents, the growth of love between the false Patrice and Hugh' brother Bill, the return of her baby's brutal father Steve Georgesso into Helen/Patrice's life, the forced midnight marriage that wil enable Steve to claim the property "Patrice" will inherit on the elde Hazzards' death, Helen's determination to kill Steve, her theft of th gun from the library of the Hazzard house and her furtive visit t Steve's downtown apartment and her terrified discovery that some one else has already shot him to death and that Bill is on the scen too—everything in *I Married a Dead Man* happens as it did in "The Call Me Patrice," only with much greater detail and emotional impac and much more of a sense of inevitability.

In the rather hasty final scenes of the novelette, Helen and Bill wer taken off the hook for Steve's murder by the perfectly timed confessio of an offstage character. Expanding "They Call Me Patrice" fo hardcover, and no longer in need of a slick-magazine compromis ending, Woolrich devised one of the most stunning and radica climaxes in fiction, piling absurdities and inconsistencies and contradictions atop one another as he had on a smaller scale in the 1937 "Waltz" and the 1938 "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes," and for precisely the same reason: to reveal the nature of the universe. Helen and Bill take Steve's body into the countryside and Bill drops it onto the roof of a freight car on a long train crawling along the railroad track below them. They return to Caulfield and find Mother Hazzard on her deathbed. The old woman gives Helen a letter which is to be opened only in her moment of greatest need. The day of Mother Hazzard's funeral, two plainclothesmen come to the house and demand to talk with Bill. Helen overhears them telling him that Steve's death has been reported to them by Harry Carter, a private detective, and also hears Bill's admission that he had hired Carter to shadow Steve. Why it had taken Carter several days to report the murder, where and how the body had been recovered, are never explained. When the detectives take Bill away with them and Helen thinks he's being arrested, in desperation she opens the letter from Mother Hazzard. For a moment Woolrich tempts us to believe he's going to give us a Hollywood denouement "where everything always come out all right, where good is good and bad is bad, and the magic spell is always broken just in time for the happy ending. . . ." In the letter, dictated on her deathbed to her attorney, Mother Hazzard herself confesses to Steve's murder, claiming that Carter had called *her* after following Helen and Steve to the house of the Justice of the Peace where the forced marriage had been performed, and that she had then taken the gun from the library drawer and gone to Steve's apartment and shot him. Bill comes home again and tells Helen that the police don't suspect either of them of anything but have been fooled by some false evidence he had planted into thinking Steve was murdered by underworld associates. Why the private detective Carter never told the police about having seen Bill and Helen go out into the countryside with Steve's body is never explained. Helen and Bill tear up Mother Hazzard's confession and are married. On their return from a honeymoon, the Hazzard family lawyer gives Helen a *second* letter dictated to him by the dying Mother Hazzard, a letter meant for Helen's eyes only, to be given to her only if she has married Bill and intended to add to their happiness. In it she repudiates her earlier confession, which she had made merely to shield "her children," but its details hint loudly that it was Bill who killed Steve Georgesson. How Mother Hazzard's false confession could have contained so much truth when she knew nothing of the circumstances of Steve's death, how she could possibly have thought that her hints of Bill's guilt in the second deathbed letter would add to Helen's happiness, are not only never explained but beyond any conceivable explanation. Yet Bill, who loves Helen desperately and has no reason to lie, still swears to her that he's innocent. And Helen, our viewpoint character, certainly didn't kill Steve herself. There is no third possibility. The longer we try to make sense of what we've been given, the crazier we are driven. And that of course is Woolrich's point: reason doesn't work, we are abandoned to the powers of darkness, and "the world drops away, and there is nothing left underfoot to stand on."

The last chapter returns us to the first-person monologue with which the novel opened.

> The summer nights are so pleasant in Caulfield. They smell of heliotrope, of jasmine, and of clover. The stars are warm and close above us. The breeze is gentle as a baby's kiss. The soothing whisper of the leafy trees, the lamplight falling on the lawns, the hush of perfect peace and security.
>
> But not for us.
>
> The house we live in is so pleasant here in Caulfield. Its blue-green lawn, always freshly watered; the dazzling whiteness of the porch-supports in the sun; the gracious symmetry of the bannister that curves down from above; the gloss of rich old floors; the lushness of pile carpeting; in every room some favorite chair that's an old friend. People come and say, "What more can there be? This is a home."
>
> But not for us.
>
> I love him. More than ever before, not less. So bitterly I love him. And he loves me. And yet I know that on some day to come, maybe this year, maybe next, but surely to come, suddenly he'll pack and go away and leave me. Though he'll love me still, and never stop even after he's gone.
>
> Or if he doesn't, I will. I'll take up my valise, and walk out through the door, and never return. I'll leave my heart behind, and leave my child behind, and leave my life behind, but I'll never come back.
>
> It's certain, it's assured. The only uncertainty is: which one of us will be the first to break.
>
> We've fought this thing. In every way we know, in every way there is. No good, no good at all. There's no way out. We're caught, we're trapped. For if he's innocent, then it has to be me. And if I am, it has to be he. But I *know* I'm innocent. (Yet he may know he is too.) We can't break through, there's no way out.
>
> It's in the very kiss we give each other. Somehow we trap it right between our lips, every time. It's everywhere, it's all the time, it's *us*.
>
> I don't know what the game was. I'm not sure how it should

> be played. No one ever tells you. I only know we must have played it wrong, somewhere along the way. I don't even know what the stakes are. I only know they're not for us.
>
> We've lost. That's all I know. We've lost. And now the game is through.

First you dream, and believe the dream is reality; then you die, or even worse you beg for the release of death and it doesn't come. Woolrich's last major novel, the culmination of almost fifteen years of white-hot creativity that permanently shaped the landscape of *noir*, is also one of his bleakest and most powerful.

No other writer would have dared to use contradiction so functionally, and Woolrich's radicalism was too much for at least one reviewer, who remarked in *The New Yorker*: "Probably only loyal admirers of Mr. Irish's work will think much of the denouement." But *The New York Times Book Review* was appreciative to the point of ecstasy.

> This story has a plot so wild, so original, as to call for one of those hat-eating statements. Not since [Kenneth Fearing's] *The Big Clock* has there been such an imaginative premise. Not only that, but the writing sustains it. The suspense races. . . . The central character . . . is as real as Hester Prynne, and twice as dynamic in her desperation. Mr. Irish has given another happy demonstration . . . that a good, dramatic idea can exist for its own sake in a book, and not just as a come-on to the big movie money. This work of his is a fascinating experience.

The following year the novel appeared in paperback (Avon pb #220, 1949) and, ironically enough, Paramount Pictures offered big money for the movie rights although, as we'll see, the screen version junked Woolrich's climax in favor of a variation on the ending of the *Today's Woman* novelette. The most recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30670, 1983) features one of the less striking Larry Schwinger cover illustrations. What artist could have done justice to the transcendent despair of this novel?

• • •

On February 11, 1948, Fred Dannay wrote to Woolrich at the Marseilles, describing his desire to "start a new department in *EQMM* to be called Favorite Stories of Famous Writers." His hope, he said, was that if several well-known mystery authors were to list their ten favorite short stories of crime and suspense, a few of the choices would be reprintable in the magazine "with an appropriate editorial introduction." Therefore he invited Woolrich to name the ten tales in the genre "which you have always considered either the best, or your personal favorites, or the ones that gave you the greatest kick." Woolrich's handwritten reply, on February 13, tells us volumes both about his reading tastes and the extent of his knowledge of the field.

> Dear Dannay:
>
> It's no imposition at all, but it's one hell of a job, because I do very little reading of any kind, and when I do read, my favorites are Westerns. Boy, how I love Westerns!
>
> However, I'll try to do the best I can so please bear with me. (And remember, if I can get ten items down here, it means I've probably read only twelve all told, and that's no kidding.)
>
> Cornell Woolrich

At the foot of the letter he listed ten stories and their authors. Two of his choices had recently been reprinted in A.L. Furman's 1946 *The Fourth Mystery Companion*, which had also included two Woolrich stories, and five others had appeared in Frank Owen's 1946 anthology *Murder for the Millions*, which had also included four by Woolrich himself. It seems that he composed his list simply by pulling down his copies of those volumes, scanning their contents pages—perhaps without even reading the stories—and picking titles more or less at random. As if to signal Dannay that his choices weren't to be taken seriously, he headed his roster "Ten Best-Liked Detective/Crime Shorts: (Quality not necessarily entering into it)." Four of the ten are routinely competent jobs by people like Vincent Starrett, Mignon G. Eberhart and George Harmon Coxe. One—Robert Bloch's "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper"—is a horror story. The only tales he chose which would widely be considered first-rate are Phyllis Bottome's "The Liqueur Glass," John Collier's "Back for Christmas" and "Midnight Blue," and James M. Cain's "Dead Man." But if Woolrich wasn't well read in the genre, he was no fool either. The tenth tale on his list, which he added "quite unblushingly" and obviously in hopes that Dannay would buy reprint rights, was his own 1937 pulper "Nellie from Zelli's." Dannay didn't rise to the bait and the story has never yet been resurrected.

• • •

In the December 1948 issue of *EQMM*, he did reprint Woolrich's 1943 "The Body in Grant's Tomb," mentioning in his introduction that it was one of a series of New York Landmarks tales and that a collection of these stories—to include "Red Liberty" (1935), "You Pays

Your Nickel"/"Subway" (1936), "Murder on the Night Boat" (1937), the Grant's Tomb thriller and two suspensers set in the Hayden Planetarium and the Holland Tunnel—would be published in the spring of 1949 or a little later. In fact no such volume ever appeared, and the planetarium and tunnel adventures were never even written. This nonevent was to be a paradigm for the last twenty years of Woolrich's life.

PART THREE

TWILIGHT

CHAPTER TWENTY

Not even Woolrich himself knew it at the time, but his burst of white-heat creativity had come to an end with the completion of the *noir* novels published in 1948. That dark frenzy of energy had lasted just short of a decade and a half. Its cessation was signaled, at least metaphorically, by two events in the year *Rendezvous in Black* and *I Married a Dead Man* were released.

Sometime during 1948, somewhere in Mexico, at some point in his seventies, from some cause unknown, Genaro Hopley-Woolrich died. To whatever extent his son's career was a plea for Genaro's attention and respect and love, its *raison d'être* was gone now. Woolrich reverently set down in his 1937 desk diary "my father's resting place—Panteon Español, Cuartito IV (Spanish Cemetery, Section IV), Mexico City, Mexico," and noted that the grave was "marked with a tile plaque, on which his name is written."

Late in 1948 the board of directors of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., which had been formed in March 1945 as a sort of crime authors' trade association, voted that Woolrich should receive one of the organization's awards, a ceramic bust of Edgar Allan Poe, MWA's version of a Hollywood Oscar. The Edgar was not given to Woolrich for any particular story or collection of stories but for the totality of his contributions to short mystery fiction. It was a sort of Life Achievement Award, and even though no one intended the implication, objectively there seemed a subtle hint that most of Woolrich's work was behind him. The bust was presented at the organization's annual dinner on April 19, 1949, at the Henry Hudson Hotel. One of the few people still alive and active in the genre who attended that dinner was attorney and mystery writer Harold Q. Masur (b.1909). Woolrich, he remembers, did show up to receive the award, and celebrated by "drinking more than he could hold." Woolrich was not an MWA member, and the honor bestowed by his colleagues did not inspire him to join either then or later.

Months before the night of the dinner he had effectively stopped writing. With his father dead, his mother almost seventy-five years old and in worsening health, and the virtual guarantee of steady money from paperback reprints and movies and radio and (to a greater extent each year) television, why should he keep writing novels and stories which deep in his mind and heart he considered garbage? Of course, if one judged only by the number of times his name appeared in print and media credits, he looked prolific as ever. But if we break down into categories the works that came out and the money that came in during his four years of transition from manic creativity to virtual silence, the truth strikes us in the face.

First, the movies. Even in those years of the old Hollywood's decline and fall, RKO released *The Window* (1949), based on Woolrich's 1947 "The Boy Cried Murder"/"Fire Escape," and Paramount offered *No Man of Her Own* (1950), a film version of *I Married a Dead Man*. But Woolrich was no more involved with these pictures than he had been with any others since 1929 and First National's *Children of the Ritz*. His total income from movies between 1949 and 1952 was $14,000. Next, radio. That medium paid Woolrich $4,000 in 1949, the last year before it was killed off by television's competition, but he never made more than a few hundred or at most a thousand dollars from radio in any subsequent year, and this only for supplying source material. Finally, TV. Woolrich's adaptability to the newcomer medium was recognized early on, and between 1949 and 1951 he averaged $1,750 a year in permission fees, but he never lifted a finger to write a TV script (as he may have for radio's *Suspense* in the forties) and contented himself with selling adaptation rights.

When we examine his appearances in print during the 1949–52 period, the same pattern emerges. Eliminate the softcover editions of earlier novels, and the old pulpers revived in *EQMM* by indefatigable Fred Dannay—six in 1949, four in 1950, another four in 1951—and the hardcover and paperback collections of previously published stories, and very little remains. Woolrich made between $10,500 and $13,000 from literary rights alone in each year from 1949 through 1951, and

$6,200 during the marginal year 1952, but only a small fraction of the money was for new material. In a creative sense he was coasting.

• • •

Each of three paperback houses reprinted a full-length Woolrich classic during 1949, with the newly launched Graphic Books offering an abridged edition of *Deadline at Dawn* (Graphic pb #16, 1949), the venerable Pocket Books presenting the first softcover of *Rendezvous in Black* (Pocket Books pb #570, 1949) and Avon competing with *I Married a Dead Man* (Avon pb #220, 1949). But no publisher issued a new Woolrich novel that year and no periodical hit the stands with a new Woolrich story. The only fresh material of his to come out in 1949 was a pair of noncriminous tales which, after failing to sell them to magazines, he set at the beginning and end of the year's single collection of his short fiction, *The Blue Ribbon*, published by Lippincott in the first week of January as a Story Press book under the William Irish byline. These are perversely fascinating tales, full of bizarre Woolrich quirks and therefore worth our attention.

"The Blue Ribbon" is narrated by Carpenter, a spindly and nearsighted young man who, as a boy in New York's tenement district, was first beaten up by another kid named O'Reilly and was then more or less adopted by O'Reilly's formidable mother. On his deathbed, O'Reilly's father, a former championship prizefighter, had made his wife swear to turn their boy into a champ too, and her way of doing this is to make the youngster wear a blue ribbon in his hair so that he'll have to fight all the other boys in the neighborhood and in time become an expert with his fists. The normal reader will probably consider this outrageous. Woolrich doesn't. Indeed the narrator Carp's reverence for O'Reilly's gross and dreadful mother knows no limit: "She was a mother the old Spartans would have understood. A mother who reared warriors." And no less perverse is the all-but-sexual union between O'Reilly himself and Carp, who becomes his manager:

> "Every blow that landed on him, landed on me too. Every fall he took, I went down with him. Every drop of blood he lost was drawn from me as well. Every drop of sweat he sweated, I paid out with him. Every time he hurt, and every time his heart broke, I hurt for him and my heart broke right in time with his.
>
> "What love for a woman can match up with that: what you feel when your man's in the ring?"

Eventually O'Reilly wins the championship, but then he becomes involved with a lovely Park Avenue socialite and leaves his mother's apartment—one of the deadliest sins in the Woolrich Bible. It's a sin, however, for which his penance is heavy: he loses the fighting spirit that made him a champ, and his mother dies of heartbreak. He becomes a bum. A few years later Carp runs into him on the street, wearing a sandwich board, and decides to stake everything he has in a last-ditch effort to restore O'Reilly's manhood. Finally he wangles a comeback bout for the ex-champ, but his spirit has not returned and the other fighter is beating him into raw meat—when suddenly the ghost of Mother O'Reilly appears in the arena, holding up that old blue ribbon, shaking it at him contemptuously. O'Reilly rises to his knees—"reared there on them, in an attitude curiously suggestive of penitence"—then gets up off the canvas and wins the match.

As if aware that the story was weird enough already, Woolrich doesn't have O'Reilly win the crown again or even want to. His aims now are modest. "I'll take on two or three more," he tells Carp, "just so I'll have a little money put aside. And then I'll quit the fights. I'll quit on my feet, though, and not on my back. That's what she wanted, I guess. That's what she wanted me to do." It's not hard to sense Woolrich's own tormented determination to keep punching out words until he had won acceptance, not as a literary champ, but at least as something better than a failure at "serious" fiction.

This tale is followed by six pulpers from the thirties: "The Dog with the Wooden Leg" (1939), "The Lie" (1937), "Hot Towel" (1938), "Wardrobe Trunk" (1936, as "Dilemma of the Dead Lady"), "Wild Bill Hiccup" (1938) and "Subway" (1936, as "You Pays Your Nickel"); a mixed bag indeed, running the gamut from his best pulp efforts to his worst. The last story in *The Blue Ribbon* and the only other new work besides the collection's title tale to be published by Woolrich in 1949 was the overly lush but strangely moving "Husband," in which he tried to give form to his most intimate—some might say most undisciplined and maudlin—feelings about love. The setting is Hollywood and the opening situation comes straight out of 1937's "Shooting Going On": a proud young man, married to and desperately in love with a woman who's become an overnight movie sensation, is so unhappy at having lost his wife to her career that he's about to leave her. This time the man's name is Blaine Chandler and he's a World War II veteran who lost a hand in the Pacific. Rather than just walk out of the marriage like his pre-war counterpart, Chandler decides to end his misery by putting a bullet in his head. One evening while his wife is at the studio, working overtime in a costume picture, he says a poignant farewell to her photograph: "You were just lent to me for a while. You are too beautiful to belong to any one man all your life. I should have known that. I know it now. It's time to give you back, I guess, and not be greedy. If you'd only been a little less beautiful, then I could have had you all to myself." Then he takes out his service pistol one-handed and puts it to his head. Suddenly the phone rings and automatically he answers it. It's the studio, reporting a terrible accident: the celluloid collar his wife was wearing caught fire, burning her face horribly. (The same kind of accident had killed actress Martha Mansfield on the set of the silent film *The Howards of Virginia* back in 1923, and Woolrich had fictionalized the tragedy twice before, in the 1929 novel *Times Square* and the 1934 mystery story "Preview of Death.") Chandler takes the news as almost a gift from God, for now his love will need him again. He nurses her at the hospital for weeks while her face heals. Then, going way beyond any physician's competence, the doctor tells him that only if she undergoes a great deal of expensive plastic surgery will she ever be beautiful enough to resume her career. Chandler loves her so much that he consents to lose her again and authorizes the procedure. The final scene, in which we are to learn whether the operations worked, is drawn out to keep us in suspense just as if this were one of Woolrich's crime stories. The climax is a masterpiece of schmaltz: to the human eye she's lovely as ever but the beauty the camera sees, the beauty that made her a star, is gone—or so Chandler is told by the plastic surgeon, another medic miraculously expert in movie matters—and she is his till the end of time. As he takes her in his arms, the music comes up from a background radio, "rising in sudden rapturous crescendo," and we fade out on the sound of violins. Millions and millions of them.

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A full year passed before the appearance of Woolrich's next book, *Fright*, the second and final novel published by the Rinehart firm under the George Hopley byline and the first and most interesting of the three full-length works of Woolrich's winding-down years. It's a period piece, set in 1915 and 1916, just a little before the author's adolescent return to New York City, with opening and closing sections set in Manhattan and overflowing with uncannily vivid descriptions of the way the city was then, or rather of the way Woolrich remembered it.

> It was so big, so cavernous. It gave you vertigo. Shoals of lighted taxis went by, like regimented fireflies executing precision maneuvers. And their horns went squawk, squonk, squonk, squa-a-awk. An El train flashed across the air like a flaming concertina, the next block down, at Third, with a sound like somebody playing the kettledrums.

The centerpiece of the book runs almost a hundred and fifty pages and unfolds in a nameless small city in the Midwest. In these two locales Woolrich sets one of his most deeply flawed and obsessively written novels, a character study in paranoid terror, almost plotless, pockmarked with technical gaffes, burdened by the least sympathetic protagonist in any of his books—and yet so rich in headlong emotional drive that one can't stop reading enthralled till the bitter end.

Fright isn't an expansion of any earlier Woolrich story but its theme comes from the tales like "Dusk to Dawn" (1937) and "Murder Always Gathers Momentum" (1940) and "Marihuana" (1941) in which a terrified man flails through the nightscape of the city, convinced that the police are after him for murder. Except that the action extends over two years rather than a single night and takes place largely away from Manhattan, this is precisely the predicament of the main character in *Fright*. Prescott Marshall, a young and ambitious Wall Street clerk, meets the lovely Marjorie Worth, daughter of a prominent stockbroker. Struck by both her beauty and her father's potential for advancing his business career, Marshall sets his cap for her and talks her into marrying him. During their engagement period disaster strikes in the form of Leona Harris, a mercenary slut with whom Marshall had enjoyed a drunken one-night stand. Having discovered that her quickie lover is a man of prospects, Leona pays him a return visit and demands money—first a little, then a lot more, until Marshall is driven to sneak across town and rent a new apartment under a false name to elude her. She finds him again just hours before the wedding ceremony and makes her most outrageous demands yet. In a frenzy Marshall throttles her and stuffs her body in his closet. From that moment on he is torn apart by guilt and paranoid fear that he's being hunted for the murder, that the net is tightening around him. In his panic to save himself he kills one man, then another, until finally both his world and his mind are shattered. A brief epilogue, the only scene from outside Marshall's point of view, adds a grimly ironic twist which will long ago have been anticipated by readers even half alert.

A complete catalogue of *Fright*'s flaws would be almost as long as the book, but many of them boil down to what Anthony Boucher in his *New York Times* review called Woolrich's "falsification of plot for the sake of a facile irony, with a few unexplained coincidences left over." To put it another way, Woolrich in *Fright* blithely ignores whatever would, in a consistent world, derail his predetermined train of events. Marshall changes his name and moves to a new apartment to escape Leona's blackmail, but his best friend Lansing not only finds him without trouble but doesn't bother to ask him what the hell is going on. While they're still on their honeymoon, Marshall forces his wife to move to the Midwest with him, and doesn't even let her go back to New York for her clothes lest the police follow her to him; but once they're settled in their new home he lets her correspond with her mother in Manhattan, which would certainly have brought the police to his door if he were wanted. He doesn't even check the New York papers to see if Leona's body has been found. This is unconscionably stupid behavior, or more precisely it's a transparent network of contrivances to make possible the bulk of the novel, in which Marshall insanely assumes that whatever is the slightest touch out of the ordinary in his new life—an unknown caller at the front door, a strange new employee at the office—is part of the machinery closing in on him. And yet even though Marshall looks and acts so abominably guilty, not a single person around him, including his wife, has any idea that something is radically wrong with him. When Marjorie's mother dies, Marshall pretends he's going to accompany her back to New York for the funeral but avoids the trip at the last minute by inflicting an injury on himself. Marjorie discovers the deception but not a word is said about it afterward, it's as if it never happened. Marshall shoots and kills a stranger whom he mistakes for a detective on his trail, but not a word is said about the murder afterward, that too becomes by Woolrich's fiat a nonevent. Even in the haunted world of the *roman noir* there must be more consistency than this.

Fright is no less flawed in terms of style. Woolrich tends to use clumsy asides to the reader to explain various facts of life in the nineteen teens. "Ordinary conversation, unless it became inordinately vociferous, was in itself no disturbance to others at a picture show; it was indulged in without hindrance at all times." He perpetrates some word pictures grotesque enough to qualify as self-parody. "The night was like purple ink. And it was as though the bottle that had held the ink had been smashed against the sky by some insurgent celestial accountant. For heaven was pitted with its tiny, twinkling particles of broken glass. And there seemed to be no one up there to sweep them up. God's office was closed for the night." Even on the subject that most deeply terrified him he becomes at times unconsciously hilarious, as where Marshall watches a man dispose of a candy wrapper. "Death of a chocolate bar. Death and burial of a chocolate bar. Death of a man? What was the difference? Death was death, always death." His grammatical blunders ("Her beauty was what had first attracted him, tangoing at teatime at the Plaza in a long split skirt") are not always justified by the need to maintain frantic narrative drive. And the feverishly overripe dialogue between Marshall and Marjorie makes the lushest silent movie titles seem like models of Hemingwayesque restraint. It's no wonder that except for one short-lived paperback (Popular Library pb #424, 1952) the book has never been reprinted in the United States.

Apparently Woolrich wanted to write an American *Crime and Punishment* but without an originating crime, without a Porfiry Petrovitch character, and without giving either philosophic or psychological depth to his Raskolnikov, whose whole life is reducible to the phrase Paranoid Guilt. *Fright* is certainly the most ambitious novel

Woolrich published in his final twenty years, but on every conceivable level it's too flawed to be taken seriously. Yet the book is far from trash. As Boucher's *New York Times* review pointed out: "No one could read a dozen pages of *Fright* without recognizing the authentic Woolrich mastery of the terror of the everyday-gone-wrong . . . there is no one mystery story writer more adept at suggesting the small, uncertain terrors of life and the evil latent in drab characters." Countless descriptive passages, both of natural and man-made wonders, tremble with unearthly beauty. Here for example is a lake just after dawn.

> The water was now like fluid brass with the rapidly mounting sun. It cast a phosphorescent yellow gleam even on the trunks of the firs and spruces that ventured down the steeply inclined slopes too close to it, and moved illusionary viscous disks about on the undersides of their overhanging shoots and branches.

And here for contrast is a public transportation vehicle.

> An electric trolley came grinding by, the one he needed to take to get home. Sluicing majestically through the lesser shoals of horse-drawn beer trucks, grocery carts, flimsy tin Fords with their high, awning-covered backs, and an occasional privately owned Reo or Mercer, Stutz or Locomobile, jaunty with brass fixtures and ochre or ketchup-red body paint. Its overhead transmission-rod contemptuously spit turquoise sparks on these underlings as it glided along the air-strung conductor.

The scene where, a moment after Marshall strangles Leona, the doorbell rings, is a gem of pure terror, as is the later game of cat-and-mouse between Marshall and the visitor who may be an insurance salesman or may be one of Them, out to trap him. When the Woolrich word magic works at all, it still works miracles. And it works in *Fright* enough of the time so that the impossible nature of the book as a whole becomes a cause for that much more regret.

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In 1950 Woolrich decided it was time he had a will. He asked an officer at the neighborhood branch of the Chase Manhattan Bank to recommend an attorney and was referred to Edwin McMahon Singer (b.1911), who not only prepared Woolrich's will but saw him and his mother every few months thereafter. He remembers Woolrich as "a very quiet, introverted person" and Claire as "a very sweet, unassuming, wiry, motherly type woman. She had rather a round face, Cornell had a narrow face. . . . In her quiet way she had a strong influence on him." Most of his meetings with Woolrich were over lunch. "We never discussed business, we discussed events of the day and things like that. . . . I was enthralled with the stories he told about Mexico, but they've long since left my mind." How many of those tales of Woolrich's youth were true is another matter.

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About halfway through 1950 and six months or so after *Fright*, the Lippincott house published under the William Irish byline the story collection *Somebody on the Phone*, the last new Woolrich book from the publisher of every Irish hardcover title since *Phantom Lady*, for which the pseudonym had been created. All eight of the tales included had first appeared in pulps between 1934 and 1940, and seven had been reprinted in *EQMM* in the year and a half before the volume's release. The book consisted of "Johnny on the Spot" (1936), "Somebody on the Phone" (1937), "Collared" (1939), "The Night I Died" (1936), "Momentum" (1940, as "Murder Always Gathers Momentum"), "Boy with Body" (1935, as "The Corpse and the Kid"), "Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair" (1934) and "The Room with Something Wrong" (1938, as "Mystery in Room 913"). Each story except possibly "Collared" was well above average in quality—no surprise considering that the book's unofficial editor was Fred Dannay—and at least five are among Woolrich's finest works of short fiction. If his nine-year association with Lippincott had to end, it's good that the relationship ended as well as it had begun.

Woolrich must have had advance notice that the break with his principal hardcover publisher was coming, for within a month of the appearance of *Somebody on the Phone*, yet another William Irish story collection was in print, this time a paperback original like the two Avon volumes of 1945–46. Offered by the company which had previously reprinted the *After-Dinner Story* collection as *Six Times Death*, the new softcover *Six Nights of Mystery* (Popular Library pb #258, 1950) brought together half a dozen pulpers first published between 1936 and 1944, each set in a different city and retitled so as to identify its location and to suggest (falsely) that its action took place in a single night. Included in the collection were "One Night in New York" (1937, as "Face Work"), "One Night in Chicago" (1939, as "Collared"), "One Night in Hollywood" (1944, as "Picture Frame"), "One Night in Montreal" (1936, as "Crime on St. Catherine Street"), "One Night in Paris" (1936, as "Underworld Trail") and "One Night in Zacamoras" (1940, as "Señor Flatfoot"). Clearly the emphasis was on pulpiness, not suspense or *noir*. Whose idea it was to include "Collared," which had been reprinted just a month earlier in *Somebody on* *the Phone,* is anyone's guess. The copyright page credits stated that "One Night in Zacamoras" had never been published before, but this was a lie and the first instance of a practice in which Woolrich was to indulge throughout the fifties, passing off revisions and expansions of old work as brand-new. Since it was a paperback original and therefore by definition worthless, *Six Nights of Mystery* was reviewed nowhere and quickly passed into oblivion. Today copies are highly prized by collectors.

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While those volumes were in production, Woolrich was finishing his next two novels, which were likewise published about a month apart—one at the tail end of 1950, the other early in 1951—and in the same radically different formats. This time the paperback came first. *Savage Bride* (Gold Medal pb #136, 1950) was Woolrich's earliest original softcover novel. Thanks largely to Fawcett Publications line of Gold Medal books launched earlier that year, a lucrative market for mysteries, Westerns, actioners and mild sex novels had opened up almost overnight. This market was the functional equivalent of the then dying pulp magazines and had the added virtue, from the writers' point of view, of cutting out the hardcover publishers who until then had been raking off a huge share of all paperback reprint royalties. Unlike any other novel Woolrich had yet written, *Savage Bride* harks back to his tales of fantasy, horror and exotic adventure for *Argosy* and similar pulps. Civil engineer Larry Jones rescues a strange young woman named Mitty from her archaeologist guardians, who are keeping her a virtual prisoner much as the mad scientist had kept the strange young woman in 1938's "Jane Brown's Body." Like the ill-fated hero of that pulper, Jones promptly marries the girl he has rescued. They honeymoon aboard the SS *Santa Emilia,* which is taking him to a new engineering job (shades of Genaro!) in Central America. Love-struck, Jones remains blind to a slew of hints that the marriage was a mistake and that Mitty has something unspeakably wrong about her. Then his bride jumps ship in the steamy hellhole of Puerto Santo and the vessel sails off minus both Joneses, who are stuck in the tropical port for thirty days, until the next boat docks. Almost at once Mitty is hypnotically drawn to the desolate interior of the country, to the so-called Tierra de los Muertos, the Land of the Dead, that lies on the other side of the last outpost of civilization; and Jones is drawn along in her wake. About halfway through the novel, after a protracted buildup of menacing shadows and pounding drums, Mitty and Jones—along with the planter Mallory, with whom they've been staying, and Mallory's teenage daughter Chris—are captured by a primitive Mayan tribe and taken through uncharted jungle and a maze of mountain tunnels into the Indians' lost city in the land of the dead. Mitty, it turns out, is the tribe's high priestess, who had been spirited away in a mummy case by the archaeologists a few years before and was brought back to life, like the heroine of "Jane Brown's Body," in the United States. Most of the book's second half has to do with which of the three captives, if any, will be able to avoid becoming a human sacrifice and escape back to the twentieth century.

The plot owes a heavy debt to Tarzan movies and Maria Montez-Jon Hall flicks like *Cobra Woman* and sinks *Savage Bride* to a level way below Woolrich's best work. But if the novel is impossible to take seriously it's likewise impossible to lay down unfinished. Woolrich does his damndest to invest the ridiculous story line with his unique *noir* sensibility. The book begins as any of his suspense classics might have begun. "His name was Lawrence Kingsley Jones. He was just like any man, like you, like me; and yet, this is what happened to him." The protagonist is thrust into the nightmare by chance or fate or God-the-malign-thug like countless earlier Woolrich characters: lost in the dark, he asks for directions at the wrong house and sees his *ange noir* peering through an upstairs window. Woolrich gives us dozens of eerie descriptive touches ("A coppery haze appeared in the eastern sky, like brick dust floating around in the night") and some unforgettable moments of horror, as when Jones is forced into a mountain tunnel: "The lips of rock narrowed over him, sucked him in. Darkness." There is even another Prayer to the Absent God: "Oh, Somebody, whoever you are, be on our side for just this one time." Evocations like these make *Savage Bride* worth reading despite the high camp plot, and demonstrate that even in a misfire of a book Woolrich can create dark magic like no one else on earth.

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About a month later, Rinehart published another Woolrich novel, his last in hardcover, his last under the William Irish byline, and one of the weakest and most conventional books of his career. *Strangler's Serenade* was expanded from Woolrich's 1945 novelette "Four Bars of Yankee Doodle," with the basic story line identical in both versions: vacationing New York plainclothesman Champ Prescott encounters several deaths on the isolated Joseph's Vineyard peninsula and comes to believe that they're the work of a serial killer utilizing a whole grab bag of Bizarre Murder Methods. Woolrich employs a variety of devices to turn the already quite lengthy novelette into a novel. The first sixty-odd pages of *Strangler's Serenade* track the original version quite closely, with more detail added to make each scene longer. Having exhausted the three murders from the novelette, Woolrich introduces a great deal of new material including acerbic social observation of the community's reaction to the deaths, comic rivalry between Prescott and the sheriff's son for the attention of lovely Susan Marlow, a church social, and a fourth murder along the dark seashore while the dance is going on, the events leading up to this crime and its aftermath being seen from the viewpoint of the victim's pregnant and terrified girlfriend. The halfwit Lon Bardsley, who is being framed for the murders in both versions but survived the novelette intact, isn't so lucky in the book-length version, suffocating to death in a sand dune thanks to an accident just as bizarre as the book's murder methods. The sequence where Prescott "deduces" the motive behind the killings is drawn out interminably but with no gain in credibility. When we reach what everything in the novel has been building to, Woolrich lets out all the stops and gives us a fifty-page set-piece of suspense, cross-cut in the grand D.W. Griffith manner as the murderer stalks Susan in her lonely house while Prescott frantically races across the peninsula to save her. The killer escapes so that Prescott and a posse of citizens can chase him into the wilderness to his death. The new material is more emotionally involving and vividly written than anything in the novelette, but the plot is still hard to swallow, the murderer's motivation idiotic, the Woolrich word magic intermittent at best, and the incidental characters all too often stereotypes, worst of all being the rooming house servant Athena, a fat black mammy who speaks Stepin Fetchit dialect, rolls her eyes in fright, and has no reaction whatsoever when she sees a lynch mob going after a member of another despised outgroup, the retarded Bardsley. The weaknesses in *Strangler's Serenade* far outweigh its strengths, and it's not surprising that except for Detective Book Club and Popular Library paperback editions soon after its hardcover release, the novel has never been reprinted in the United States.

After completing the expansion of that book, Woolrich stopped writing altogether. If we believe his own testimony, by the fall of 1951 he was in the hospital, apparently for a lengthy stay, with his mail being forwarded to him from the Marseilles. One of the letters he received at this time was from William Thailing (b.1926), a Cleveland railroad worker who had been a devoted Woolrich fan ever since coming across a battered and incomplete copy of *The Black Angel* while on a World War II troopship bound for the South Pacific. Thailing's ambition was to own a copy of every word Woolrich had ever published, and after several years of collecting he wrote to ask the author for information about some of his more obscure pulpers. In return for supplying the facts his fan needed, Woolrich asked to borrow a copy of one of the magazines Thailing already had so that he could transcribe it for himself. "They let me do a little light work," he wrote, "and I could copy it in pencil. It would only take about a week." Thailing promptly sent him four rare pulps. In mid-November Woolrich replied with a letter running four handwritten pages.

> Dear Mr. Thailing:
>
> The four stories arrived safely Monday a week ago. Please don't think me ungrateful if I haven't answered until now. I've been busy every minute since then copying the first of them. They only allow me a short time each day, and so I wanted to use it all up. I've now finished it, as you see, and am returning it.
>
> And now please let me tell you how much I appreciate your kindness. You don't know how I thank you. You see, this is just what I need to keep me going. Until I can do original work again (which I can't as yet) this is the best kind of medicine for me. It is very hard, but writing was always hard, and without it, I have nothing.
>
> You have given me a very good week. It's been a long time since I had any. All I can say again is that one word Thanks. So short, but so much in it.
>
> Excuse this scrawl. The room is dark and I am not supposed to be awake, but I am using a flashlight I keep under my pillow to write by. If anyone comes to the door, I will duck down. Like a little kid again.

Woolrich never explained why he was hospitalized but, reading between the lines of his letter, one suspects alcoholism or a nervous breakdown—unless he was pretending to be laid up in a bid for sympathy. Later in the same letter he told Thailing that his favorites among his novels were *The Black Angel* and *Rendezvous in Black* but that he had no basis for picking the best among his shorter works. "I haven't owned copies of them (except the ones that appeared in books) for so many years that I can't remember much about some of them." He then asked to borrow some more items from Thailing's collection, and from then on, whenever Woolrich needed the text of a pulp tale for sale to a reprint magazine or use in an anthology or collection, it was Thailing who supplied it. Thailing never asked for anything in return. Being in touch with the writer he revered so deeply was reward enough.

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Nothing new by Woolrich was published for a year and a half after *Strangler's Serenade* except a single short story, but his name and fame didn't suffer. In 1951 alone, paperback houses reprinted *The Dancing Detective* (Popular Library pb #309, 1951) and *Somebody on the Phone* (Graphic pb #31, 1951, as *Deadly Night Call*, with two stories omitted), while Fred Dannay revived four excellent Woolrich pulpers in *EQMM*, and the classics "Marihuana" (1941) and "You'll Never See Me Again" (1939) were republished in Dell's short-lived series of 10¢ paperback booklets, both little volumes being scarce collector's items today. In addition the Woolrich byline could be seen in the credits of several episodes of live TV dramatic series like *Suspense* and *Robert Montgomery Presents*. But to those who could tell recyclings and adaptations from new material it was clear that the master of the haunted word had fallen silent.

Woolrich's correspondence with Dannay at this time is in the same vein as his letters to Thailing. On December 11, 1950, he asked to borrow Dannay's copy of the issue of *Argosy* containing Part Three of his 1939 serial "The Eye of Doom." He needed it, he said, "[j]ust long enough to have a typescript made of it. I find it's missing from my files [although he told Thailing that he *had* no files], and it's a shame not to have the four parts complete. . . . I give you my word you will get it back safe and sound within a week." Dannay complied at once. Later that month Woolrich wrote again, asking for the loan of the *Argosy* issue containing Part One of the same serial, claiming that "if you will let me have [it] the job will be complete." Again Dannay complied. On February 7, 1951, Woolrich asked him for the fourth installment. "If you'll let me have that one, I won't bother you any further. It seems a shame to have gone this far, and not complete it." With hindsight we know exactly what Woolrich was up to: he planned to rewrite "The Eye of Doom" and try to sell it elsewhere as brand-new. Eventually, when Avon Books published the revised version as *The Doom Stone*, he succeeded.

By early 1951 Dannay had bought from Woolrich the reprint rights to "Soda-Fountain Saga," which had first appeared in *Liberty* back in 1930, and also to several pulpers including "Blue Is for Bravery" (1937) and "The Fatal Footlights" (1941). At the end of his letter to Dannay dated February 7 of that year, Woolrich asked him to publish these works under what he called "my own definitive titles," which respectively were "Soda Fountain," "Blue Serge" and "Death Along 42nd Street." Later in the year Dannay learned that the owners of the long defunct *Liberty* were claiming ownership of all rights in "Soda-Fountain Saga" and that similar claims as to a number of Woolrich's suspense pulpers were being made by Popular Publications, which had taken over many of the classic mystery magazines of the thirties and forties. The discovery led to confusion and bickering between Dannay and Woolrich. On February 1, 1952, Woolrich offered to substitute for each legally clouded story another pulper as to which he claimed he had documentation proving his ownership, so that, for example, the reprint agreement for "Soda-Fountain Saga" would be cancelled and replaced by one covering "Death Along the Champs-Elysées," which was Woolrich's title for the 1937 "Nellie from Zelli's." Apparently this arrangement did not go through, for Dannay never did reprint either that story or the 1937 "Dusk to Dawn" which

Woolrich also proposed as a replacement. On the other hand Dannay wound up running at least seven clouded stories in *EQMM* issues of the fifties after paying reprint fees to Popular Publications and nothing at all to Woolrich. This led to a bitter dispute between the two men later, demonstrating that when Woolrich said in *Blues of a Lifetime* that he was "tight and wary almost to the point of travesty in business dealings with strangers," he should probably have cut the last two words from the self-assessment.

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Woolrich's 1952 income was just under $6,500, the lowest figure of any year since 1941. But thanks to Popular Library's editions of *Fright* (Popular Library pb #424, 1952) and *Strangler's Serenade* (Popular Library pb #431, 1952), his latest novels were available in paperback. And new collections of his old stories were still so much in demand that two such volumes came out in 1952. Rinehart, at the moment his principal hardcover publisher, offered *Eyes That Watch You* in July under the William Irish byline, the fifth and last title and the first and only story collection it issued during its seven-year association with Woolrich. The book included samples of his best, his most typical and his most boring: "Eyes That Watch You" (1939, as "The Case of the Talking Eyes"), "Stuck" (1937, as "Stuck with Murder"), "Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight" (1939), "Murder with a U" (1941, as "U, As in Murder"), "All at Once, No Alice" (1940), "Damned Clever, These Americans" (1937, as "Clever, These Americans") and "Flat Tire" (1938, as "Short Order Kill"). Except for a Detective Book Club edition later in 1952 it has never been reprinted. Anthony Boucher in his Criminals at Large column for *The New York Times Book Review* tried to be generous. The three novelettes in *Eyes That Watch You*—that is, the first, third and fifth of the titles listed above—he praised as "richly representing [Woolrich's] best work." The other four he dismissed as "minor gimmick stories, which any hack could have written"; but he advised readers to "overlook them, settle down to the longer stories and revel in the skill of the foremost master of the breathtaking this-could-happen-to-me impact."

By mid-1952 Woolrich's chief paperback publisher was Popular Library, which in a five-year period had reprinted the collections *After-Dinner Story* (retitled *Six Times Death*) and *The Dancing Detective* and the novels *Fright* and *Strangler's Serenade*, plus the 1950 softcover-original collection *Six Nights of Mystery*. At the end of the year the company issued a second collection under the William Irish byline, *Bluebeard's Seventh Wife* (Popular Library pb #473, 1952), which consisted of "Bluebeard's Seventh Wife" (1936), "The Morning After Murder" (1936, as "Murder on My Mind"), "Silhouette" (1939), "The Hat" (1939, as "The Counterfeit Hat"), "Humming Bird Comes Home"

(1937) and "Through a Dead Man's Eye" (1939). Although all six had first appeared in pulps, the book's copyright page insisted as had that of *Six Nights of Mystery* that one of the half-dozen, this time "The Morning After Murder," was new. Woolrich had rewritten the story to eliminate much of the crude slang and point up the disturbing *noir* elements, but the plot is the same as in 1936. Many of the six tales were quite good and the volume's overall quality was superior to that of the hardcover *Eyes That Watch You* from a few months before. But like all paperback originals of the period, *Bluebeard's Seventh Wife* went almost completely unreviewed and was unaccountably ignored even by Boucher, who had been championing good softcover mysteries in his *New York Times* column almost from its first appearance in mid-1951. The collector who owns a copy today is lucky indeed.

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It was also late in the year that a magazine specializing in science fiction and fantasy printed Woolrich's only really new work to appear during 1952. "The Moon of Montezuma" (*Fantastic*, November-December 1952) is set in the Mexico of his childhood, specifically in the valley of Anahuac, the place where Woolrich had first understood that someday he would die. To an isolated house in the valley comes a beautiful blonde woman with a golden infant in her arms and a red rosebud pinned to her coat. She is searching for the American husband who deserted her and the baby he had never seen. Living in the house are a wizened old Mexican woman and her darkly lovely daughter Chata, whose own baby has just died. What the blonde woman doesn't learn until too late is that both babies have the same father. Chata murders the newcomer, buries her body beneath the white rose bushes planted beside the well in the patio, and takes the living infant to replace her own dead son. But the red rosebud comes to life in the earth where the murdered woman lies, and grows in time into a blood-red bush. When Chata tries to destroy the blossoming witness to her crime, she becomes entangled in its tendrils, falls into the well and breaks her neck under the eye of the moon of Anahuac. Woolrich tries too hard to be portentous, alternating between the past and the present tenses for no good reason, punctuating the story line with touches of fake profundity. ("The roses sleep pale upon the blackness of a dream. The haunted moon looks down, lonely for Montezuma and his nation, seeking across the land.") But at its best the style is vibrantly colorful and generates a mood of poetic horror.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

From the beginning of 1953 till the middle of 1958, Woolrich's total output of new published work added up to exactly one short story, "The Black Bargain" (*Justice*, January 1956). Yet thanks to his continuing popularity in the reprint markets and the visual media (principally television), his annual income kept on a respectable level: just over $8,000 in 1953, just under $10,000 in 1954, about $20,000 in each of the next two years, around $13,500 in 1957 and a bit more than $18,000 in 1958 when some fresh Woolrich material finally got into print. Among his novels reissued in new paperback editions during the drought period were *The Bride Wore Black* (Pyramid pb #80, 1953, as *Beware the Lady), Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (Dell pb #679, 1953, as by William Irish), *Waltz into Darkness* (Ace pb #D40, 1954, abridged), *Phantom Lady* (Graphic pb #108, 1955, abridged), and *Savage Bride* (Gold Medal pb #719, 1957). The Dell Great Mystery Library, a new softcover series supervised by Anthony Boucher, included both *The Bride Wore Black* (Dell pb #D186, 1957) and *Phantom Lady* (Dell pb #D207, 1957) among its earliest selections. Fred Dannay revived in the pages of *EQMM* nineteen more Woolrich pulpers from the thirties and forties, the vast majority never previously anthologized or collected (although several were condensed by Dannay without notice to the reader), and the magazine's parent company, American Mercury, offered digest-sized paperback editions of *Black Alibi, The Black Angel, The Black Path of Fear* and two of the forties story collections in its various mystery series. *The Saint Detective Magazine*, launched by the puckish and erudite Hans Stefan Santesson (1914–1975) in the spring of 1953 as a sort of bush-league competitor of *EQMM*, imitated its rival in reprinting old Woolrich stories as often as possible, although with his minuscule budgets and less encyclopedic knowledge of the genre, Santesson tended to use tales already familiar from Woolrich's hardcover collections. In 1956, when veteran pulp editor Leo Margulies created *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* (which made even *The Saint* look affluent by comparison), he too fell into the practice of reprinting Woolrich now and then.

Clearly Woolrich had gone dry, but he continued to maintain the illusion of creativity. A good deal of his writing time during these years was spent on revising and updating old pulpers for distribution to subscriber newspapers by the King Features Syndicate, and at least a few of these retreads were published as new Woolrich thrillers. When Flying Eagle Publications announced a new and well-funded mystery magazine called *Manhunt*, Woolrich promptly sold its editors "The Hunted," a tale set in Japan and supposedly fresh from his typewriter. But when the story appeared in the magazine's premiere issue (January 1953), a long-memoried reader wrote in to point out that *Argosy* had run it fifteen years earlier as "Death in the Yoshiwara." The editors were not amused.

There was only one sense in which Woolrich got anything out of Hollywood that year. Among the summer's movie releases was *Vicki* (20th Century-Fox, 1953), a fairly close remake of the same studio's 1941 *I Wake Up Screaming*, based on Steve Fisher's novel. Jeanne Crain, Jean Peters and Elliott Reid had the parts which in the earlier version had gone respectively to Betty Grable, Carole Landis and Victor Mature. The role of the psychotic detective Cornell, played by Laird Cregar in the original, went this time to Richard Boone, who transformed the character into a Noir Cop for the Mickey Spillane decade, exuding a menace that was more physical than Cregar's but no less intense and disturbing. It would be interesting to know whether Woolrich saw the picture, and if so, what he thought of Boone's performance as a sociopath rooted in Woolrich himself.

In December of 1953 Woolrich turned fifty, and his mother, whose health was deteriorating, celebrated her eightieth birthday the following year. From then on Woolrich left the Hotel Marseilles almost never, just to get a haircut or a few drinks, or perhaps to see a movie, or for sex. Occasionally he would run into Lee Wright, who had bought his first suspense novels for Simon & Schuster. "Every time I saw him," Wright told me in 1979, "he would tell me how lonely he was, that nobody loved him. And I would say to Cornell: 'Well, it's probably your own fault. I mean, you sort of put people off. You're too shy. Why can't you be more outgoing? You'll find that people will like you very much. You're very likable.' And he would say: 'You're so wonderful.' Not me! You know, you never could believe a word he said, really, although *he* believed it at the time." One evening when her husband was out of town, Wright invited Woolrich and one of the Simon & Schuster sales representatives to dinner at her apartment. The two men left together at about eleven, and afterward the salesman told Wright that he had "had a terrible time protecting himself from Cornell on their way home on the Elevated. It almost amounted to a physical attack. . . ."

Woolrich's one serious writing project during the middle 1950s was his most ambitious attempt at mainstream fiction since the books he had written in the Jazz Age. He wanted to do an episodic novel about the birth, youth, prime, middle age, decline and death of a New York hotel much like the Marseilles, with each chapter taking place in the same room at a different moment in the building's life span. We know he was working on this book as early as 1955 since the *Manhunt*-like magazine *Justice* published one episode, "The Black Bargain," in its January 1956 issue. The other chapters, which had nothing to do with crime or suspense, were unmarketable to genre magazines like *EQMM* and failed to interest the editors of mainstream periodicals either. Woolrich kept plugging away at the project as and when he could.

Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, the best-known and most successful of all the dozens of movies based on Woolrich material, was released in 1954. Woolrich made very little money from the film, and there is no reason to believe that he and the great director whose background and unique talents and tormented soul were so much like his own ever discussed the picture while it was under way or even met each other. "Hitchcock wouldn't even send me a ticket to the premiere in New York," Woolrich complained near the end of his life. "He knew where I lived. He wouldn't even send me a ticket." Since Woolrich is unlikely to have paid his own money to see what Hitchcock had wrought, it's quite possible that he never saw the movie at all.

In the wake of *Rear Window* and perhaps on the strength of his Hitchcock connection, Woolrich contracted with the Dodd Mead publishing house to assemble two new collections of his short stories. Their understanding was that each volume would include tales from previous collections, old magazine stories not previously collected, and new thrillers never before published anywhere. Whether Woolrich ever intended to write new material for these books or was deceiving Dodd Mead all along is not known. In fact he passed off revised versions of four old pulpers as new work and the publisher advertised them as such.

The first of the two Dodd Mead collections was published in 1956 as *Nightmare*, and the first two stories of the six contained in the book were the ones supposedly fresh from the Woolrich typewriter. But "I'll Take You Home, Kathleen," about an ex-convict who comes home to find his girlfriend beaten to death and himself the target of a lynch mob, was a new version of 1940's "One Last Night," with some slight editing and polishing and a few modifications at the end so that the explanation of what happened is marginally more plausible. And "Screen-Test," in which a low-level LAPD plainclothesman probes the incineration of a Hollywood star on the set of a Civil War picture, was an updated and heavily rewritten adaptation of Woolrich's third published crime tale, the 1934 "Preview of Death," with no significant plot changes but lots more of both insult humor and *noir* coloration than in the original. When the dead woman's black maid tells the detective that "that's about all the good life is: a bottle of gin and don't remember yourself," it's hard not to hear in her words the voice of her creator. Next in the collection came two stories admittedly culled from previous Woolrich volumes, "Three O'Clock" (1938) and "Nightmare (1941, as "And So to Death"), each as powerful a *noir* classic as ever. These were followed by a pair of old but hitherto uncollected suspensers, the excellent "I.O.U." (1938, as "I.O.U.—One Life") and the workmanlike "Bequest" (1942, as "Implacable Bequest"). What needed to be said about *Nightmare* was as usual said best in *The New York Times Book Review* by Anthony Boucher.

> By sober critical standards there is just about everything wrong with much of Woolrich's work. This collection of six stories illustrates most of the flaws: the "explanation" that is harder to believe than the original "impossibility," the banal and over-obvious twist of "irony," the casual disregard of fact or probability (the Los Angeles Police Department so understaffed that only a single investigator of low rank can be spared to handle the murder of a film star!). However, critical sobriety is out of the question so long as this master of terror-in-the-commonplace exerts his spell. It is an oddly chosen collection, representing neither the best nor the least familiar of Woolrich . . . but it is characteristic, and I do not envy the hard-headed reader who can resist its compulsive black magic.

If Woolrich's creative life in the mid-1950s had gone stale, his physical environment had become appalling. The Marseilles was turning into an urban dunghill as successive managements kept finding new corners to cut. Woolrich tells us in *Blues of a Lifetime* that the building's floors were coated with "ingrained and ineradicable grime," that the airshaft was filled with combustible debris, that the tenants were plagued by everything from blown fuses and crawling elevators to mice in the walls and frequent burglaries. The fire stairs were littered with fruit peels, beer cans and pages from old newspapers, and since every bulb had been stolen from the walls, going down those steps was like "running inside a box in the dark." Woolrich's description makes the place seem like one of those dreadful tenement buildings we saw every week on *Hill Street Blues*. Near the end of his long tenancy, he says, there wasn't even a telephone connection between his apartment and the lobby, because in the latest economy move the downstairs switchboard had been taken out. Certainly he and his mother could have afforded to leave this dismal and dangerous cage long ago. Why hadn't they found a better place to live? The only rationale Woolrich offers in his autobiography is the feeble excuse of habit. The Marseilles was "a home to us," he says, "we were used to it, and I felt with all a writer's typical superstition that it had brought me luck and it would have been ungrateful of me to move."

By 1957, "as the concentration camp of Harlem burst apart its barbed-wire boundaries," the hotel's population was almost completely black, and Woolrich and his mother were the only whites on their floor. Their neighbors included a prostitute, an alcoholic welfare mother and some of the poorest of the working poor. In *Blues of a Lifetime* he expresses no queasiness about his racial isolation such as we might have expected in view of the black stereotypes in his pulpers. Quite the contrary. "We were all just people together. Some poor, some better off than that; some young, some older than that; some healthy, some (like my mother) sick almost unto death."

Claire had suffered a massive heart attack in the spring of 1956. Afterward, although she could still move around freely within the apartment, she was unable to go outdoors. From then on her son was as surely a prisoner of the Marseilles as if a turnkey had locked him in each night. In the fourth chapter of *Blues of a Lifetime,* which is unappetizingly entitled "President Eisenhower's Speech," Woolrich describes the evening of February 20, 1957, when the hotel caught fire and he and his mother were trapped in their upper-floor apartment. To the extent we can believe his account, its details provide the best testimony we are ever likely to have as to what his life was like in his mother's last months.

On October 6 of that year, at the age of eighty-three, Claire Attalie Woolrich died. She had been taken to a hospital by then, and her son haunted her bedside. A few years later he described the night of her death to Lou Ellen Davis, who in 1987 told the story to me.

> He said she was in a hospital room, and he was with her, and she was not conscious, and he had had to hire an outside

> nurse because she needed round-the-clock care. And this outside nurse was very brusque and unpleasant, and I think he said she was fat. . . . And I think he said at one point she had her foot or in some way was like blocking the lifeline, or something that was very dangerous, very life-threatening. And he got mad, and she said: "Oh, well," you know, and stopped doing it. And he walked around the block or whatever, and—I think he said that he came back and she was dead. The resentment [over her death] was focused on this woman, on the nurse.

A service was held at the Walter B. Cooke Funeral Home on West 72nd Street, and her body was interred in the family crypt at the Ferncliff Mausoleum in Hartsdale, near White Plains. Edwin Singer handled her estate. The day she died, Woolrich began dying too.

He wrote nothing for publication about his reaction to her death, and even in *Blues of a Lifetime* he dismisses the subject in four words: "She is gone now. . . ." Elsewhere in the autobiography, he tells us, "I didn't cry even when my mother died, though my arm shook and my whole body too, as I stood up with a brandy and toasted her, somewhere sight unseen. But you don't have to cry to love someone, to miss them." A year or two later he told paperback editor D.R. Bensen "that every night he set out a bottle of champagne and two glasses, one for him and one for his mother, and drank a toast to her. . . . He was close to but not quite tearful in telling me this." If there were anyone to whom he could have spoken his feelings, he might have said what Raymond Chandler had written to two friends less than three years before Claire's death, when Chandler had lost his wife Cissy, who had been old enough to be his mother. "She was the music heard faintly at the edge of sound. It was my great and now useless regret that I never wrote anything really worth her attention, no book that I could dedicate to her. . . . She was the light of my life, my whole ambition. Anything else I did was just the fire for her to warm her hands at."

According to *Blues of a Lifetime,* "[t]o the end of her life, my mother never read a single line I wrote. Not because she didn't want to, but because I prevailed upon her not to. She often asked me to let her see something. 'Not this,' I'd say each time. 'Wait'll something better comes along.' And take it out of her hands and close it. I wanted to make a good showing, I guess; I wanted her to read only the best. The next one was always going to be better than this one. Then when the next came along, the one after was going to be better than that. She was docile and trusting in everything that concerned me. Perfection never came along. She never read a word I wrote."

Whether she heard any of the radio dramas or saw any of the movies or TV plays based on her son's fiction will never be known. Less than two weeks before her death, a sixty-minute film version of "Three O'Clock," directed by Alfred Hitchcock, was broadcast on the NBC anthology series *Suspicion*. It is the most unremittingly suspenseful picture Hitchcock ever made and the most faithful adaptation of Woolrich for the visual medium. Claire may well have gone to her grave without seeing it, and so may her son.

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Either shortly after her death or while she was in the hospital waiting for the end, Woolrich moved out of the Marseilles firetrap to an apartment in the Hotel Franconia, at 20 West 72nd Street, just off Central Park, in terms of physical environment a huge leap forward. Dan J. Marlowe (1914–1986), a former businessman and gambler who was about to launch a new career as one of the finest writers of original paperback suspense novels of the sixties and seventies, claimed in a letter to me written in November 1968 that he had met Woolrich in a publisher's office only a day or two before Claire's death. "I was an unpublished writer at the time," he said, "although I had sold the first two books of what became a series of softcover originals to Avon." Woolrich was also involved with Avon at the time, having just sold the company a short story collection which would be published in 1959 as *Beyond the Night*. The two authors met one morning in their editor's office, Marlowe says, "and Woolrich invited me to visit him (he was then staying at the Hotel Franconia near Central Park). I was flattered, since I was a great admirer of his work. I know now—or I think I know—that he merely wanted to find out from me what my advance from Avon was in comparison to his own. Woolrich had a genius for suspicion, both founded and unfounded."

If Marlowe's memory wasn't playing him false, that first meeting with Woolrich must have taken place at the very beginning of October 1957. "I was living at the time in Connecticut," his letter goes on, "but we arranged that I would come down four days later for dinner and an evening on the town. In the interval his mother died, and I walked into the apartment to find Woolrich, his aunt, and a couple of cousins milling around. When I learned what had happened, I was astonished to find that he still proposed to go out on the town with me. His aunt was furious, and they engaged in a verbal battle in which they said stinging things to each other. I could see that she was trying to establish domination over him (at that time I didn't know the background of the mother–son relationship) and that he was resisting it. Eventually he practically pushed me out the door with the whispered assurance that he would call me."

Did this really happen in October of 1957? Neither Marlowe's first novel nor Woolrich's *Beyond the Night* collection was published until 1959, and Avon is unlikely to have paid advances on these books and then sat on them for well over a year before putting them in print. My own guess is that Marlowe met Woolrich in October of 1958, not '57, and that what Woolrich's aunt objected to was his going out for a night on the town on the *first anniversary* of Claire's death. As chance or fate would have it, I was unable to ask Marlowe whether my theory was right. Several years before his recent death he fell victim to that most common *noir* ailment, amnesia (though his came as the result of a stroke, not a blow on the head), and afterward could not recall anything of his former life. When he read some of his own novels, however, he thought they were quite good.

In any event, Marlowe told me in his 1968 letter, Woolrich did call him, about six months after their aborted last meeting. "Out of the blue, when I had forgotten all about him, my phone rang one afternoon and there was Woolrich asking when we were to have our evening together. I drove down to New York at once, and we had our evening, which turned out to be a disaster. He didn't drink much, but I learned quickly that any amount was too much for Woolrich. He simply went to pieces, and I learned later that this was his pattern. In his defense it should probably he said that at this time he weighed perhaps 120 pounds and every drink probably hit him three times as hard as it did a larger man." Marlowe helped Woolrich back to his hotel and "had an unpleasant three minutes with his aunt, who was in residence, before I was able to deposit Woolrich and take my departure. I never saw him again, although we did exchange a few notes from time to time. There was a wit in his notes sadly lacking in his person. . . ."

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Woolrich's reaction to Claire's death seems to have been schizophrenic. It devastated him and liberated him at the same time. The aunt who moved into the Franconia with him and tried to take his mother's place was Claire's widowed sister, Estelle Tarler Garcia. She didn't last long.

Around this time Woolrich made the acquantance of Frank Belknap Long (b.1903), a well-known writer of horror fiction. "We met in 1957," Long recalled in an interview (*Twilight Zone*, January 1982), "when Leo and Cylvia Margulies invited me to a party at which [Woolrich] was present." Over the next couple of years Long would stop in at the Franconia now and then for a chat. Woolrich, he says, was "very shy and unassertive in many ways. After his mother died he went all to pieces." He describes Woolrich as an "open, honest, sort of naive individual," which is not how that wretched man was seen by anyone else who knew him. "I remember he was very upset once that

Hans Santesson had told him to leave a meeting of the Mystery Writers of America for drinking too much. A fellow writer had to guide him home." And despite all his money and fame he continued to feel both financially and professionally insecure. "He always talked as if he were hard up and afraid he wouldn't sell his next story."

Not that there *were* any next stories at this time in Woolrich's life, but he kept his writing slump to himself and pretended he was active as ever. Late in 1957 *Manhunt* offered a second Woolrich story which its editors had bought as a new work only to learn that they'd been scammed: "The Town Cried Murder" (*Manhunt*, January 1958) was a rewrite of the 1942 pulper "The Hopeless Defense of Mrs. Dellford." They demanded their money back from him and got it.

In early March of 1958 Woolrich fell into another dispute with a mystery magazine editor, indeed with the one editor in the field who had been going all out to keep his name and reputation alive during the years of drought: Fred Dannay. Among the nineteen old stories by Woolrich that Dannay had reprinted since 1953, there were seven for which *EQMM* had paid the reprint fee not to Woolrich himself but to Popular Publications, which then owned the pulps where the tales had originally appeared. When Dannay wrote inviting Woolrich to send in new stories rather than reprints, Woolrich raised this issue in a typewritten letter of March 3.

> Mr. Dannay:
>
> You have printed the following stories of mine, without permission from me and without payment to me: . . . Figuring at the former inadequate rate of $150 a story, that amounts to $1050 owed me by your organization.
>
> When I receive a check for this amount, I will consider directing new material to you. Until then, I will not be bound by any consideration, legalistic or personal.
>
> *And*, until then, there will remain a breach between us.
>
> Believe me,
> Cornell Woolrich

The most ancient Woolrich story in *EQMM*'s reprint inventory was "Soda-Fountain Saga," which had first appeared in *Liberty* in 1930, and for which Dannay had paid Woolrich $150 twenty-odd years later, only to run into the claim of *Liberty*'s present owners that they and not Woolrich owned the relevant rights. It was probably this experience that had led Dannay to pay Popular Publications rather than Woolrich for the seven pulpers to which that company made similar claims. At around 2:30 A.M. on April 16, six weeks after his first nasty letter to

Dannay on the subject, Woolrich tried to settle the dispute by proposing a swap along the lines he had laid out in February of 1952.

> Dear Fred—
>
> Having just finished my tax chores, and being therefore in a very peace-on-earth mood, I'd like to send you a few lines, and see if we can't get this thing settled.
>
> About the old stories—I think I'd rather not let them go around any more, for the present anyway. Later on, you can always get them from the Chase Manhattan Bank, who get my estate, there being nobody else around. I imagine you and the magazine will be here long after I will.
>
> I have just finished a radio play. . . . If you'll recede the rights to me on "Soda Fountain," I'd like to send you the radio script for the same money. With the understanding of course that I'll do new work for you from now on. I think I can promise you three if not more new pieces even during the rest of this year, which is already one quarter gone.
>
> In other words, along with the letter of agreement covering the radio play, send me the old letters of agreement on "Soda Fountain," as well as a release therefrom, no money to pass between us.
>
> Hope you will consider this.
>
> Sincerely,
> Cornell

For once Woolrich wasn't lying about a work of his being new. The radio play he described in the letter was an adaptation of his 1936 suspenser "Dilemma of the Dead Lady," better known as "Wardrobe Trunk," and he had registered it with the Copyright Office just nine days earlier, on April 7. Dannay restored normal business relations with Woolrich by accepting the proposal and Woolrich did send *EQMM* three more stories that year, all of which Dannay purchased, although he held off publishing one of them until 1962 and didn't print the radio play till 1964.

In June of 1958 Dodd Mead issued *Violence*, the second of the two Woolrich volumes which were supposed to contain new material as well as older stories both collected and uncollected. In fact all three of the book's allegedly new tales were revised old pulpers, and the only new aspects of the volume were that it had a dedication—"To Petty," whose identity remains a mystery—and that either Woolrich or a Dodd Mead editor had divided it into four subtitled sections, which seems an excessive number for a book of only six stories. Part I, "Clock-Races," consisted of those supreme classics "Don't Wait Up for

Me Tonight" (1937, as "Goodbye, New York") and "Guillotine" (1939, as "Men Must Die"). Part II, "Love and Murder," contained a pair of forties tales passed off as new. "That New York Woman" was the same rewrite of 1942's "The Hopeless Defense of Mrs. Dellford" that Woolrich had sold to *Manhunt* as a new story several months before. The updated version is more poignantly written and emotionally wrenching in spots, with a profusion of relationships described in religious language ("You were so clean, you were redemption," the dead Gregg Dellford tells his wife in a flashback). But even though the plot and the courtroom climax are revamped so that the murderer turns out to be not a human being but (I am not making this up) a railroad freight car, the Stupid Murder Trial sequence retains all the pulp version's idiocy. "Murder, Obliquely" was a rewrite of 1947's excellent "Death Escapes the Eye," with the exact same plot but somewhat different details. The narrator's name is changed from Lizzie Aintree to Annie, she's no longer the editor of a mystery magazine (indeed she seems not to work at all), and there is no mention of her physical unattractiveness or the fact that she's several years older than the male lead Dwight Billings, as there was in the earlier version. Dwight is no longer married to his *ange noir* Bernette but only living with her. Annie Aintree no longer tries to maneuver Billings into marriage but is willing to have sex with him without a commitment. The black houseman Luther is given more dignity than he had in his 1947 incarnation. These changes neither add to nor detract from the power of the story. Part III, "Primitive," consists of just one tale, or more precisely fifty percent of one, namely the first half of Woolrich's 1952 fantasy-horror piece "The Moon of Montezuma." We shall never know whose crazy idea it was to leave out the rest of the story. In Part IV, "Violence with a Wink," we are treated to "The Corpse in the Statue of Liberty," an unacknowledged rewrite of one of Woolrich's earliest pulpers, the 1935 "Red Liberty," with exactly the same plot but a bit more action at the climax, and with huge chunks of tinny insults from the thirties replaced by equally indigestible mouthfuls of tinny insults from the fifties. Even Anthony Boucher was taken in by the false advertising for the collection, describing the tales in *Violence* as "all new to book form"—which he should have known "Guillotine" wasn't—and as including "some never published before anywhere." But he was less than overwhelmed by the choice of stories, saying in *The New York Times Book Review* that "Guillotine" was the only one of the six which "ranks with the best of Woolrich's unforgettable pulp classics. . . ." Perhaps this judgment is unfair to "Goodbye, New York" and "Death Escapes the Eye," which many would include on their short list of Woolrich's best. But all the half dozen, Boucher went on, "display, if to a lesser extent, [Woolrich's] mastery of detail in creating tension and terror out of the commonplace." The collection was reprinted only once, by the Detective Book Club.

By 1958 Lee Wright had moved from Simon & Schuster to Random House where, among many other titles, she was editing the Ellery Queen novels of Fred Dannay and his cousin and collaborator Manfred B. Lee. She was not involved with Random House's single book by Woolrich, the episodic novel on which he had worked in fits and starts while his mother was dying. *Hotel Room* was published in July of that year, about a month after *Violence*, and was dedicated

To
Claire Attalie Woolrich
1874–1957
In Memoriam
This Book: Our Book

Except for one chapter it was devoid of crime elements, but no other person in the world could have written a line of it. The setting is Room 923 of New York's Hotel St. Anselm—the same name he had used for the hotel in the 1938 *noir* classic "Mystery in Room 913"—and the story of the building's birth, adolescence, maturity, old age and death, as told through the stories of the people who checked into Room 923 at various points in time between 1896 and the late fifties, represents Woolrich's last sustained attempt to break into the mainstream and be accepted again as a writer, not just a suspense writer. It failed. The book wasn't even reviewed in the *New York Times* as almost all Woolrich's suspense novels and collections had been, it wasn't picked up by any of the book clubs or paperback houses, it earned pitiful royalties for a few months and then died like the hotel it described. No one has seen fit to resurrect it since. The reasons for its failure are understandable. Woolrich was straining to write significantly, and the huffing and puffing showed on the pages. The style is ponderous, laughably overloaded with elephantine metaphors and similes, posturings and preachments. *Hotel Room* reads as if Woolrich thought that the vivid word magic of his best fiction was the enemy of serious literature. His renunciation of his stylistic power produced a book that is often positively painful to read. On the other hand, its structure and much of its content were well within the boundaries of the dark universe he'd been exploring all his life.

The book's opening chapter, "The Night of June 20, 1896," unfolds on the St. Anselm's first night in existence, which is also the first night in the married life of Mr. and Mrs. John Compton. The newlyweds check into Room 923 for their honeymoon, but John steps out for a few minutes so that his bride can undress in privacy and, like the characters in "You'll Never See Me Again" and "Finger of Doom" and so many other Woolrich suspense stories, almost literally steps off the face of the earth. Unlike the vanishing people in those tales, John never returns. His disappearance, which is permanent and unexplained as Woolrich had wanted that of the Phantom Lady to be, turns his wife into a catatonic. "Good-bye, Johnny! Good-bye!" she murmurs as the story ends. "And good-bye to me too. For we both died in here the other night."

The next two chapters are halves of a single story whose plot and mood recall the knowing, worldly-wise tales Woolrich wrote for *College Humor* and other magazines of the twenties. On "The Night of April 6, 1917," a few hours after the United States's entry into World War I, a shy and naive young man checks into Room 923, having just enlisted in the army, and calls his favorite girl to invite her for a night on the town before he goes overseas. Ted and Jean end their night getting married in rural Connecticut at 4:00 A.M., somewhat like Angela and Dewey in the 1927 *Children of the Ritz*. They make a date to meet in the same room 923 on the night the war ends, when they'll pick up the threads of their relationship. If you're wondering how they could expect Ted to be back in the States a few hours after the armistice, just remember this is supposed to be a story of romantic naiveté. As it happens, he *is* back on "The Night of November 11, 1918" and keeps his date, but in the year and a half since his wedding night both he and Jean and the nation as a whole have entered the twentieth century. They no longer have the least physical attraction for each other and each has found someone new, but they discover that they can still be the best of buddies, and the story ends with Ted offering to drive Jean to her date with a boyfriend.

"The Night of February 17, 1924," which had been published in the January 1956 issue of *Justice* as "The Black Bargain," is a Prohibition tale about the last hours of a doomed gangster. Woolrich spends many a page making Jake Abbazzia such a hateful creep we want to see him dead, but when our wish becomes reality and Abbazzia is cornered in Room 923 by rival mobsters, the gears shift and we are made to live his last moments from his perspective and indeed to experience death with him. In at least this sense, that Woolrich still wants us to identify with the most depraved when they are face to face with nothingness, the story belongs with classics like "Three O'Clock" and "Guillotine."

The weakest and most perverse chapter in *Hotel Room* is "The Night of October 24, 1929," whose subject of course is the collapse of the stock market. Into Room 923 comes a ruined businessman who intends to settle his personal affairs that night and go out the window at dawn. Then while poised on the ledge he imagines the rising sun speaking to him with the voice of God, reminding him that the Almighty has set his canon 'gainst self-slaughter, chewing him out as (here we go again) a yellowbelly who can't take a little punishment. Sure enough, the man decides to be a *real* man and live. Could Woolrich have feared and hated death so much that he couldn't conceive of any adequate reason to take one's own life? Yes. Is this a good story? No.

Next comes a very short and bleak chapter in which a young man named Ken checks into Room 923 with a young woman. They are desperately in love and have defied their respective parents to be together, but not only won't Ken have sex with her until they're married, he literally won't sleep in the same bed with her, and asks the desk clerk to have a cot installed in the room for him. After a full dose of gooey blissful thoughts about her future happiness, the young woman drifts off into sleep, murmuring her beloved's name. Ken. Ken. *Kensuke Murakami.* Only then do we learn the title of this chapter, which is "The Night of December 6, 1941."

Finally, on "The Night of September 30, 1957"—the last night before the St. Anselm is demolished to make way for an office tower—an ancient lady checks into the decrepit hotel, insists on staying in Room 923, slowly prepares herself for bed, and we just as slowly realize that she is the same Mrs. John Compton who slept in this room on her wedding night back in 1896. After thanking John for a perfect marriage—no shadows, no pain, no sickness or fear or strife—she dies in her sleep.

More than in any other completed book of his last years except perhaps the 1950 *Fright*, Woolrich in *Hotel Room* created a form in perfect harmony with the vision of a man who had confined himself in an urban box for almost all his adult life. The same claustrophobic setting crops up in so many of his final stories, both before and after *Hotel Room*'s publication, that it can fairly be called the last obsession of his career.

Briefly mentioning the book in his "Best Mysteries of the Month" column in the November 1958 *EQMM*, Anthony Boucher described *Hotel Room* as "less a novel than a collection of episodes, many with the impact of [Woolrich's] crime shorts." It would have been an even stronger volume if one chapter hadn't been removed from the book manuscript so that all of the *Hotel Room* episodes except its first and last would be tied (however loosely) to some historic American event. The excised chapter, which Woolrich called "A Penny for Your Thoughts," had been purchased by Fred Dannay for $250 and planned for publication as *EQMM*'s first Woolrich original, and it was Dannay's plea for more new material that had led to the eventually settled dispute with Woolrich over the seven reprinted stories. The situation portrayed in "The Penny-a-Worder" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, September 1958) was not uncommon in the pulp writing world and may have happened at one time to Woolrich himself. In the late 1930s, struggling author Dan Moody checks into Room 923, assigned to grind out a novelette literally overnight so as to match the previously commissioned cover artwork on a forthcoming issue of a *Dime Detective*–like magazine. Limiting himself as in "Three O'Clock" to a single confined setting and a single main character, Woolrich not only keeps us on the edge of our seats but gives us the most vivid picture ever drawn of the insane pressures and feverish energy of the pulpster's life, with the fate of Dan Moody's hackneyed thriller standing for the fate of everyone and everything in the Woolrich world.

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In the summer of 1958, soon after *Violence* and *Hotel Room* were published, Bill Thailing came to New York at Woolrich's invitation to meet the man whose novels and stories he'd been collecting for a dozen years. In a brief memoir ten years later, Thailing described his visit to the Hotel Franconia and Woolrich's room. "He met me at the door and I looked at a man of average build. He had the eyes of a dreamer, and a square determined chin supported a curiously thin face. His hair was on the light, sandy side. As he presented me with copies of his latest books my lifetime ambition was achieved. I had actually met the master and completed my collection of his works at the same time. We talked far into the afternoon and I learned much about his life, his writing, and his ambitions. As I left we promised to continue writing each other. And we did."

One of Woolrich's ambitions after completing *Hotel Room* was to write original scripts for the media. He had made a small fortune selling radio rights to his stories since 1943 and another pile out of licensing TV adaptations since as far back as 1946. Whether he had written any of the radio adaptations himself is unclear, but his one later effort of this sort, the sappy rewrite of his 1936 pulper "Dilemma of the Dead Lady"/"Wardrobe Trunk," is certainly no prize even though he got $250 for it from Fred Dannay. Not much better was his one and only attempt at an original script for television, which he entitled "Which Is You? Which Is I?" and registererd with the Copyright Office on June 5, 1958. Instantly he was offered $150 for first publication rights to this occult play by Robert P. Mills, who had recently taken over from the protean Anthony Boucher as editor of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, American Mercury's futuristic companion periodical to *EQMM*. As there published, the play's title was "Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life" (*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, December 1958). Outside the great casino at Biarritz, a countess, ruined by gambling fever and on the brink of suicide, suddenly finds herself inside the body of another woman, one who has in fact just jumped off a cliff into the sea. Then she discovers that in her new identity she's supporting her blind husband on her earnings as a prostitute. It's a bizarre tale with some genuine touches of *noir* amid the wild emotionalism, but no one would rate it among Woolrich's best and no one with a lick of sense would have put it on television then or later.

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The month that play was published, Woolrich turned fifty-five years old. He was unable to write any more of the suspense classics which had made him famous and equally unable to produce the sort of mainstream fiction that literary critics would accept as "serious," but if he completely stopped writing he would die, and even though he had lost his mother and was utterly alone, he wasn't ready for death. And so he went back to dabbling in the genres of exotic adventure and horror and the occult that he had explored sporadically from early pulpers like "Dark Melody of Madness"/"Papa Benjamin" (1935) and "I'm Dangerous Tonight" (1937) right up to recent works like *Savage Bride* and "The Moon of Montezuma" and the double-identity teleplay. His next three books after *Hotel Room* fall into this category. But even though they're full of his distinctive motifs and stylistic quirks, much of the legendary Woolrich word power has vanished.

The first of this trio of paperback originals to appear in print was published by Pyramid Books, an undistinguished house whose only previous dealing with Woolrich had involved a reissue of *The Bride Wore Black* in the early fifties under the title *Beware The Lady.* Pyramid paid a $3,000 advance for first publicaton rights to *Death Is My Dancing Partner* (Pyramid pb #G374, 1959) and assigned editor D.R. Bensen (b.1927) to the project. "What we had, I recall," Bensen told me in a 1987 letter, "was a fairly beat-up typescript . . . that we felt needed work to be publishable. It was really pretty awful . . . and only the Woolrich name prompted us to do it—along with the fact that in those days . . . you could chunk out about anything on the stands and enough would sell to keep everyone solvent."

Woolrich visited Bensen a few times at Pyramid's Madison Avenue offices but eventually, Bensen said, "we had to talk over some revisions at length, and I called on him at [the Franconia]. . . . The apartment was old-fashioned, and I guess he kept the shades or blinds drawn, as I remember it being dark, though it was a bright day." Woolrich made strong drinks for both of them and kept the glasses filled during their conversation, in which he described toasting his mother nightly in champagne. "He'd pour out glasses for both of them, then drink hers as well." Eventually, Bensen says, Woolrich raised the subject of money, claiming to be well fixed (which was true enough considering both his writing income and the blocks of General Motors and AT&T stock he'd inherited from Claire) but "unsure what to do about it. I got the impression that if I got to be a good enough friend of his, I'd benefit handsomely. (I don't mean anything sexually seductive here but rather bait to attract people to alleviate loneliness.) By that time he was pretty well bombed, and I was at least mildly buzzed, but not so much that I didn't feel both sad and weirded out." He didn't visit Woolrich again, "mainly because it was too sad being around him."

You'd never know from looking at the book that Bensen and his colleagues were dubious about *Death Is My Dancing Partner*'s quality. "Tension and terror mark this new novel by America's acknowledged master of suspense," thundered the blurb on the back cover. "Pyramid is proud to present Mr. Woolrich's latest work—a completely original story, which has never before appeared in any form."

The book's first draft may well date back to the late thirties, for its story line seems more in tune with the Big Band era than with the Eisenhower years. Possibly Woolrich had intended it as a serial for a thirties romance pulp like *Sweetheart Stories*, which had run "Deserted!" in four installments during 1938. But the claim that it had never been published anywhere before was true—for once. Everything else in the Pyramid blurb, however, teeters on the brink of consumer fraud. Not only does *Death Is My Dancing Partner* lack all tension and terror, it's the worst novel Woolrich ever wrote. His unmistakable hallmarks are present—episodic structure, feverish romantic dialogue, tinny insult humor, south-of-the-border settings, use of popular song lyrics to evoke mood—but neither these nor the echoes of earlier Woolrich works like "Papa Benjamin" and *Waltz Into Darkness* do a thing to save the book. The characters are beyond laughability, the dialogue beyond goopiness, the plot nonexistent. No wonder this disaster sank at once in the sea of forgotten stories!

The novel is dedicated "To Chula," the same mystery person in the dedication of *The Bride Wore Black*. We open in the Dutch East Indies, where shipboard bandleader Maxwell Jones (no relation to the Max Jones in the 1947 "One Night in Barcelona") witnesses an exotic temple dance performed by a girl named Mari, who falls in love with Jones at first sight and lets him take her to the States as his main attraction. Jones marries her in order to get her past the immigration laws but, for reasons Woolrich declines to explain, he has no sexual interest in her at all. He simply wants to use her dance to make himself a music world superstar, staking his future on the dance itself and even more on the legend that every so often during one of her performances someone drops dead. After one or two such deaths actually take place, Jones and his band become international celebrities. Max still doesn't care for Mari in the least, but just to make sure we won't think he's homosexual, Woolrich has him flaunt a succession of other women in his wife's face—until one night when in her wretched loneliness she takes poison, and Jones saves her life. Now their positions are reversed and *she* starts treating *him* like dirt, just as Louis Durand was treated by the female demon of *Waltz Into Darkness*. Finally they confess that they love each other, and their relationship shifts from mutual revulsion to ecstasy. But by this point there have been too many mysterious deaths during her performance of the Dance of Kali, and the only booking they can get is a bottom-rung dive in Panama. Mari decides to prove or disprove the legend once and for all by performing the death dance alone in her hotel room and seeing if she lives through it. This development requires us to forget that the curse is supposed to strike only at random performances, not invariably, but never mind. Mari sends Max away for half an hour, goes through the dance—and doesn't die. Hurrah! The legend is only a legend. Max comes back, opens the door—and drops dead. Curtain. A phrase of the book here and there is touched by the old Woolrich magic, but *Death Is My Dancing Partner* was such an atrocity that even the author's staunchest admirers let it go by in silence.

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One of the short stories Fred Dannay had bought after his rapproachement with Woolrich in 1958 was a tale Woolrich called "Newspaper Headline," for which Dannay had paid a generous $400. As usual, he changed the title before running it in *EQMM*. "Blonde Beauty Slain" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, March 1959) is a low-key and all but plotless succession of four little episodes showing the effect of a tabloid news story about a showgirl's murder on four sets of New Yorkers from different social strata. It's readable enough (although one of the episodes depends on wild coincidence) but low on vividness and urgency and suspense, the kind of tale that almost any moderately competent writer might have turned out.

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In April of 1959 Woolrich made a new deal with Avon Books, the paperback house which in its infancy, back in the mid-1940s, had published two of his rarest story collections, *If I Should Die Before I Wake* and *Borrowed Crime*. This time Avon was interested in his tales of occult horror, and paid him a wretched $1,000 advance to assemble the collection it released in September as *Beyond The Night* (Avon pb #T-354, 1959). As usual during the fifties, Woolrich lied to the publisher about the provenance of what he was selling. The collection's copyright page claims that three of its six stories had never been in print before, but in fact two of the three were resurrected pulpers from the thirties.

The book opens with two acknowledged reprints, the complete 1952 version of "The Moon of Montezuma" and the 1958 reincarnation teleplay "Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life." Then comes "The Lamp of Memory," which is billed as new but is in fact the same story as 1937's "Guns, Gentlemen," with minimal revisions. Fourth of the six tales is "My Lips Destroy," allegedly brand-new but actually a much expanded rewrite of the 1939 pulper "Vampire's Honeymoon." In the book version, which is set in 1955 and runs about twice as long as the original, Woolrich changes the name of Dick Manning's bloodthirsty bride from Faustine to Nera (hardly an improvement), devotes many more pages to the couple's domestic and sexual arrangements, and adds several touches of true *noir* coloration. The Manning of the fifties is not a stick figure like his 1939 predecessor but a genuine Woolrich protagonist. "I don't know where she came from; I don't know who her mother or her father is, or if she's loved before. I only know I'm marrying her tomorrow. You see her face, and then you know that, and there's nothing else you know or want to know. . . ." When he rejects his simple, safe and ordinary fiancée and takes up with *l'ange noir*, a woman drenched in uncertainty and dangerous sex and the occult and death, he is acting precisely like Wally Walters, the protagonist of Woolrich's 1926 story "Dance It Off!"—and indeed very much as the James Stewart character did when he rejected Barbara Bel Geddes for Kim Novak in that most Woolrichian of Alfred Hitchcock's films, *Vertigo* (1958). The dark lady of "My Lips Destroy" isn't just a female Dracula as in "Vampire's Honeymoon," rather she's death personified, and there is a haunting moment when Manning stalks her through the night, under the tracks of the elevated railroad that still existed in the Manhattan of 1955. "On the avenue she came back into sight again, walking up an endless phantom ladder that seemed to lie flat on the pavement, created by the moonlight filtering through the lattice of the elevated structure. Alternate black and white bands followed one another lazily down her back as she progressed." But all the nightscape poetry can't take the curse off what Boucher in his *New York Times* review called "the most tedious arrangement of clichés on the vampire theme ever assembled."

The only genuine new tale in *Beyond The Night* is "The Number's Up," a gem of *noir* set in 1929 and dealing with an innocent young man and woman who are kidnapped from their New York hotel room—could this story too have begun life as part of Woolrich's 1958 episodic novel?—and brutally executed thanks to a missing rivet in a numeral on another hotel room's door. The plot device is borrowed from the forgotten 1937 pulper "Wake Up With Death" but this time Woolrich made it integral to his vision of the random senselessness of the world, and the result is one of the few masterpieces of his last twenty years. The collection closes with "Music from the Dark," which is a new title for the 1935 classic "Dark Melody of Madness"/"Papa Benjamin." The overall fault with the book, Boucher said, was that Woolrich for the most part had picked "stories best loved by their creator because no one else appreciates them." But he rightly made exceptions for these last two tales.

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As the fifties died and the sixties were born, Woolrich continued to write very little new material for publication and at the same time to make quite decent money from effectively marketing what he'd written years before. Books and short stories accounted for about four-fifths of his 1959 income of nearly $14,000 and for about three-fourths of his 1960 income of a little over $10,000, the balance coming of course from sale of rights to movies and TV. Had he not fibbed so shamelessly to publishers, these figures might not have been so healthy. Hans Santesson published Woolrich's "Soda Fountain" in *The Saint Mystery Magazine* for March 1960 in the belief that it was new. In fact it was a rewrite of the 1930 "Soda-Fountain Saga," which Fred Dannay had bought years before for reprint in *EQMM* but had never used because of the dispute over rights. Since Woolrich's bibliography was so prolific and tangled that no one including himself had ever mastered it, he rarely got caught in his lies.

Early in 1960 the Lippincott company published an attractive hardcover omnibus volume, *The Best of William Irish,* consisting of *Phantom Lady*, the *After-Dinner Story* collection and *Deadline At Dawn*. "Though the complete 'Best' of Irish-Woolrich would run to at least three more volumes of this size," said Boucher in *The New York Times Book Review*, "these will do as terrifying plunges into the vertiginous world of nightmare below the surface of everyday life." Distributed in large numbers as a selection of the Mystery Guild book club, the volume reintroduced some of the Woolrich classics to readers who, if they judged by his more recent efforts, might not have bothered with him at all.

In April Avon Books released just such an effort, its second Woolrich softcover original of the period, *The Doom Stone* (Avon pb #T-408, 1960), touting the book as "published here for the first time," which was a flat lie. This episodic novel had first come out twenty-one years before as the *Argosy* serial "The Eye of Doom," and only the last of its four chapters was new. Boucher's *New York Times* review described the plot with perfect succinctness as "heaven help us, about the diamond stolen from the eye of a Hindu idol in 1757 and the curse it brings on successive owners in Paris during the Terror, in New

Orleans under the carpetbag regime and in Tokyo just before Pearl Harbor."

Comparing the *Argosy* and Avon texts of the first three episodes is instructive if hardly rewarding. Part One, in which the French conscript Escargot steals the diamond eye from the temple and provokes the dying priest's curse on all possessors of the stone in future generations, is almost identical in both versions, with a few lines retouched for clarity or style. In Part Two, the *Scarlet Pimpernel* episode, Woolrich rewrites more systematically, adding detail to make the story a bit longer and dropping the laughably stilted exchanges of dialogue in favor of a more contemporary sound. ("What is it, think you, a man?" asks A in *Argosy*. "I misdoubt me," replies B. In the Avon version this becomes: "What is it, a man or a monkey?" and "I'm not sure myself.") In addition Woolrich converts the female lead, Philippine de Sancy, from a sort of French Brigid O'Shaughnessy who uses and cheats the men in her life to a terrified girl genuinely in love with her American sweetheart. Her *Argosy* incarnation had stolen the cursed diamond from another aristocrat in the Saint-Lazare prison, but the Avon version has the old man giving her the stone as a sort of dowry. The Philippine of *Argosy* had first urged her lover Tom Crandall to kill the lecherous Dunot and, when Tom refused, had slit the Jacobin's throat herself while he was lying helpless, but in the Avon text Dunot isn't killed at all. Woolrich reworks the episode's climax in line with these alterations. *Argosy* has the diamond left behind in France but Philippine shot to death by a border guard while crossing the river Meuse, but the Avon version has her bribe the guard with the stone and cross the border with Tom in perfect safety. "We'll find a new little Paris of our own somewhere, just the two of us, you and I," Tom tells her, echoing the "You and I together all alone" song from Woolrich's 1929 novel *Times Square*. The shift to a happy ending suggests that if one is pure in heart and ditches the diamond quickly enough the curse won't work!

In Part Three, the *Gone With the Wind* chapter, Woolrich adds several scenes and expands others to stretch out the events to twice their *Argosy* length, drops the Southern dialect of all the white characters, and makes it clear as the *Argosy* version did not that the between-episodes owners of the diamonds have also been hit by the curse. In the Avon text the Rhett Butleresque's hero is consistently named Ward Waters and the name of the diamond-intoxicated bad guy is changed from Dionyse Bellegarde to Davey Dillon. Our Mr. Black Hat isn't just a damyankee carpetbagger and a yellowbelly as in *Argosy*, he's also a man of "impure blood" and a "leper"—or rather another vehicle for Woolrich's homosexual self-contempt. In the Avon version it's not a black hag reading a rooster's entrails but a gypsy woman with a tarot deck who prophesies the villain's death by a diamond, and the echoes of *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* and the fortune-telling scene from *Black Alibi* are palpable, especially when the gypsy tells Dillon: "Your fate was waiting for you before you were born." But as the episode climaxes in the duel of honor between Waters and Dillon, Woolrich completely leaves out the *Argosy* scene where Waters had a gunsmith turn the cursed diamond into a bullet, so that the eyes of the Avon text's readers must have bulged in disbelief when the stone wound up gleaming within Dillon's shattered skull without the ghost of an explanation how it got there!

By far the dumbest of the original *Argosy* episodes was the fourth and last. Perhaps in part because he knew this but more likely because he had to have the story end more recently than 1939 if anyone were to be fooled into thinking the whole farrago was new, Woolrich junked the return-to-India chapter from the pulp version and wrote a fresh Episode Four for the Avon edition. "Tokyo, 1941" tells how the stone is bought from a misfortune-plagued Hong Kong merchant by John Lyons, an American citizen spying for the Soviet Union in the Far East shortly before Pearl Harbor. The moment Lyons returns to his Tokyo home, his long-suffering wife discovers his espionage sideline and leaves him, while at the same time the Japanese secret service comes to suspect him and assigns the beautiful dancer Tomiko to seduce him and locate his secret radio transmitter. Lyons catches Tomiko trying to get in touch with her superiors, forces her to have sex with him and then kills her just before he's subdued by the Japanese. "For the divine Emperor I die!" she cries out proudly, facing the rising sun. This patriotic gesture so overwhelms Lyons that when his captors offer to swap him for some Japanese spies in Soviet hands if only he'll first renounce his American citizenship, he chooses death instead. He leaves the diamond (which the Japanese let him keep in prison!) at the altar of a Buddhist temple outside the execution shed, and we are supposed to believe that the stone has returned home and the curse is no more. The diamond aspects are so easily detachable from the rest of the chapter that one suspects Woolrich concocted the fourth part of *The Doom Stone* by splicing those scenes into an older story he'd never been able to sell. This last episode doesn't end where it should, with the stone's homecoming, but rather with an inspirational close-up of Lyons' grave, which is inscribed: "Here Lies an American." Shades of Woolrich's childhood reaction to the Stars and Stripes in *Madame Butterfly*! The story will appeal only to those who think *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and *The Green Berets* are the apex of cinematic art, but an occasional passage still sings with the old Woolrich magic. Or, as Boucher put it in his *New York Times* review: "Few authors would dare make a straight-faced offer of such triple-distilled corn; but devout

Woolrichians (like me) may find it surprisingly potable, if hardly intoxicating."

Those who sought a true reflection of Woolrich in 1960 could find it by joining the Mystery Guild and ordering a copy of *The Best of William Irish* or by visiting whatever movie house in their neighborhood was showing Alfred Hitchcock's latest film, *Psycho*. That picture, which ranks among the director's most powerful, was based on Robert Bloch's 1959 novel of the same name, about the lonely motel and Norman Bates and his mother. As drawn by Bloch, Norman is not only a psychopathic mass murderer but a fat repulsive toad with whom it's impossible to empathize for even a moment. With the aid of a magnificent performance by Anthony Perkins, Hitchcock transformed this mother-obsessed slasher of women into a fully human and overwhelmingly sympathetic character—young, painfully thin and intense, eyes shadow-haunted, a man who knows in the darkness of his soul that the accident of birth had chained him forever and who is gifted or cursed with the bleakest of insights into his own condition and ours. "I think that we're all in our private traps," he tells Janet Leigh before the unforgettable shower scene. "Clamped in them. And none of us can ever get out. We scratch and claw, but only at the air, only at each other, and for all of it we never budge an inch." "Sometimes," says Leigh, "we deliberately step into those traps." "I was born in mine," he says. This is almost precisely Woolrich's image of the human condition as that of an insect trapped inside a downturned glass, struggling to climb up the sides, and it can't, and it can't, and it can't. Could Hitchcock's version of Norman Bates have been intended as something of a Woolrich figure? None of the countless film enthusiasts who interviewed the director in his lifetime thought to ask him that question; and in view of Hitchcock's notorious disinterest in the wellsprings of his own creativity, they wouldn't have gotten a straight answer if they had. Perhaps Hitchcock made use of the rumors about Woolrich and his strange relationship with his mother that circulated in the mystery writing community, but it's just as possible that the similarities between Woolrich and the Hitchcock version of Norman Bates stem from the uncanny affinities between these two doom-intoxicated men who barely knew each other. Truly they were the Laurel and Hardy of suspense.

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If Hitchcock did have Woolrich in mind, and saw his frailer mirror image as a man with a great potential for violence, he wasn't the only one to think so. "He called me," Lee Wright said of Woolrich when I interviewed her in 1979. "I hadn't seen him in a long time and he called me one day and asked could I please come up to see him, he was very lonely and very alone, and he badly needed to see someone whom he respected and liked. So I went up. We had tea together." Woolrich likely had something stronger. By this point he was writing next to nothing but Wright did not encourage him to try harder. "I felt that if he wanted to write books he would. There was no point in my nudging him. And I didn't want to have anything to do with him [professionally]. . . . Because I was scared of him."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

When John F. Kennedy took the oath of office as president of the United States, many Americans (mostly in the younger generations) felt that a vibrant new era in their country's life was beginning. Coincidentally, the Kennedy years were something of a New Frontier time for Woolrich too. He hadn't once left New York City since the 1931 trip to Europe with his mother, but now he made several lengthy excursions, using the Chase Manhattan Bank as his mailing address while he was out of town. In a 1961 letter to Bill Thailing he mentions having recently spent seven months in Canada. There's good reason to believe he also stayed awhile in the state of Washington, for in "The Maid Who Played the Races," a memoir he included in *Blues of a Lifetime*, he describes how he was mistaken for a jockey by a chambermaid in his Seattle hotel and jokingly offered a tip on a horse race which happened to pay off and led to his being besieged for tips by other hotel employees so incessantly that he wound up sneaking out of the building in embarrassment. Exactly what he did on these excursions no one knows. Intermittently he would return to New York and put up at the Franconia, or the Gramercy Park Hotel at Lexington Avenue and 21st Street, or at some other temporary stopping place.

On one of his visits back to New York he made an appointment with Edwin Singer and had the attorney prepare a new will. The document is dated March 6, 1961, and leaves his entire estate in trust to establish a Claire Woolrich Memorial Scholarship Fund at Columbia University, "to be used for the education of deserving college or graduate students who are interested in entering upon a career in writing." Chase Manhattan was named executor and trustee of the estate.

About once a month during the early sixties, Singer and a Chase officer named Richard Keneven cabbed to wherever Woolrich was staying at the time and joined him for lunch. "He would order a beautiful lunch for all of us, with a bottle of wine," Singer said in our interview. "We ate our lunch and he drank his wine."

With Singer and Chase Manhattan handling his legal and financial business, and with anywhere from $9,000 to $15,000 a year still coming in from old stories and novels and sales to movies and television, Woolrich would seem to have had a perfect environment for writing as prolifically as in his prime. In fact he wrote almost nothing and his hours were spent being gnawed by his private demons. "One day," Singer told me, "I got a call from the hotel [probably the Franconia] that I had to have him removed from there, because he was getting intoxicated, taking his clothes off and running through the halls in the nude. So I went to see Cornell, and he said: 'Why, they're damn liars. I'd never do such a thing.' I said: 'Cornell, if it be so, if you're going to be an obnoxious person, they're going to have a right to legally evict you.' He said: 'No way. We'll resist them.' So he did continue with the same conduct, and they did begin a proceeding to evict him. At that point he got very angry with me, and he went to one of my associates, and I was fired as his lawyer." But apparently not for long. "It wasn't long after that that I made an agreement with the hotel that he'd voluntarily move and I'd find another place for him."

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Late in April of 1961 Woolrich went to the Astor Hotel for the Mystery Writers of America annual dinner, the first such event he'd attended in years. After the banquet several dozen of those who had attended went upstairs to someone's suite for drinks and shoptalk. As the evening wore on, the group thinned first to a dozen and then to about six. One of them was Donald A. Yates (b.1930), a young professor of Latin American literature at Michigan State University and a fan and scholar of mystery fiction. Another of the half-dozen was Woolrich. After several hours, Yates said in a 1986 interview, the six "decided we were going to go out on the town for what we didn't need at that point, and that was a drink someplace. . . . And the six of us headed out, and drove around town in a taxi, hit a couple of bars . . .

and sat around until the sun came up. . . ." That was the start of one of the closest approximations to a friendship Woolrich ever experienced. "It was a long and glorious evening," Yates wrote in an unpublished memoir of Woolrich, "the first of many nights over the next seven years that I would spend doing the town with him, with this lonely writer who would never let you say goodbye until daylight was in the street. After a while he asked me to call him Con." The same nickname he'd preferred forty years before when he was palling around with people like Frank Van Craig.

"He seemed to enjoy my company," Yates said in 1986, "I think he liked being with an academic who somehow seconded his opinions, his views, on literature. I was enthusiastic about writers that he was: Fitzgerald for example, or Faulkner, or Hemingway. He had all kinds of very shrewd and right ideas about these authors, about whom I guess he couldn't speak with anybody else. But with me he felt he could, and I just made him feel good because I guess I was seconding his literary judgments on things."

He may have loved talking about Hemingway and Faulkner and Fitzgerald but he refused as if on principle to talk about himself. "He was made uncomfortable by references to his own work," Yates told me in 1987. "I honestly think that he thought it was so much garbage. Because he was never open to any query about [his own writing]. He said: 'Well, all of that doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any difference. Why bother talking about that stuff?' And I said: 'Well, I happen to like your work.' He said: 'Well, that's your mistake. There's nothing I can do about that.'"

Whenever Yates came to New York, he'd call and make a date with Woolrich, "and we would set out, in the first of the evening's numerous taxicabs, to visit some of his favorite spots. I won't be able to forget the unconcealed pleasure he communicated over the phone whenever I called to say I was in town and had the night free. It was the pleasure of a child. . . . But what was hard always came later, when I would make a move to head home. Farewells were difficult, painful, and it always seemed that our friendship was washed up when I left him. I think I see now that he was afraid to be left alone." Yates was by no means the only person to be begged by Woolrich not to leave him.

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Near the end of 1961 Woolrich did yet another of the bizarre deeds that punctuate his life. He filed a petition in the City Court of New York to change his name legally to William Irish. The petition was granted and the name change went into effect on Christmas Day.

Why on earth did he do such a thing? From what he told Lou Ellen Davis a few years later it seems to have been a way of striking back at his dead father. As we've seen, Woolrich had claimed in conversation with Davis that as a boy he and Claire had been gotten out of Mexico by Genaro just ahead of an imminent revolution, that neither he nor his mother had ever heard from Genaro again and assumed he'd been killed in the upheaval. "Years later," Davis told me in 1987, recounting what Woolrich had told her a quarter of a century earlier, "Cornell got a letter from someone who said: 'I am your half-sister by your father's second marriage.' And he was so angry that his father would do this, would be alive and not let him know he was alive and would remarry and would do this to his mother, that he went and legally changed his name from Cornell Woolrich to William Irish . . . because he didn't want Woolrich's last name any more." As usual when Woolrich talked about himself, he was lying, but with just enough of a garnish of fact so that the real truth is impossible to reach. He did change his name to William Irish but he continued to sign his name Cornell Woolrich on letters and legal documents and to use the name on his fiction for the rest of his life. Was he afraid the woman would look him up and try to enter his life? Any fool could have told him that changing his name to a pseudonym that had been known for decades to be his was hardly likely to stop her. In the end all we can say is what we have had to say time and time again. He did it and we don't know why. He was a man of smoke.

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If there was one person responsible for trying to draw Woolrich out of his shell it was Hans Stefan Santesson, editor of both *The Saint Mystery Magazine* and *Fantastic Universe*, who took Woolrich along as often as possible to the gatherings of mystery or science fiction writers at which, being involved in both fields at once, Santesson was a welcome guest. Considering Woolrich's reputation as a recluse, an astonishing number of his professional colleagues got to know him at one cocktail party or another during the Kennedy years. When I had lunch with Santesson in New York in 1971, he told me of how Woolrich would come to such gatherings, bringing his own bottle of cheap wine in a paper bag, and would stand alone in a corner the whole evening. If someone came up and told Woolrich how much he or she admired his work, Woolrich would growl: "You don't mean that," and find another corner.

Once in a rare while, out of such meetings a friendship of sorts was born. Robert L. Fish (1912–1981) had been a civil engineer in Latin America before turning to full-time writing and winning an MWA Edgar award for his first novel, *The Fugitive* (1962), and one suspects that the affinity between him and Woolrich was connected with his having worked in the same field as Genaro. With Michael Avallone (b.1924), a prolific writer of private eye novels, Gothics, movie and TV tie-in books and anything else for which there was a market, the connection seems to have been that both men loved old movies. Avallone first met Woolrich in 1962, at one of the monthly MWA cocktail parties where he was serving as bartender. "I looked up from the bar," he told documentary film-maker Christian Bauer in 1984, "and this man was standing there. Drab suit, didn't know how to wear his tie, thin sparse hair, watery eyes, a little stubble—as if he hadn't shaved in three days, or the razor blade irritated him—peaked nose, a grim forbidding mouth, not talkative at all. And I said: 'Hi, I'm Mike Avallone. Who are you?' And he said: 'Cornell Woolrich.' . . . When I met Cornell Woolrich he was already dead. . . . I was talking to a dead man for six years. . . ."

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Certainly as a writer Woolrich was close to death. During 1961, although two of his thirties pulpers were reprinted in *EQMM* and a condensation of the 1959 classic "The Number's Up" appeared in the girlie magazine *For Men Only*, not a single new word of his was published anywhere in the United States. Most of what he made that year, which totaled just under $16,000, came from TV and movie sales and royalties on his forties novels. In 1962 four more of his oldies were recycled—one by Fred Dannay in *Ellery Queen's Anthology* (a series of semiannual paperback spinoffs from *EQMM*), two by Hans Santesson in *The Saint* and a fourth by Leo Margulies in *Mike Shayne*—but a temporary decline in movie and TV money cut his income for the year to about $9,000. Three new Woolrich stories were published during 1962, only one of them at all memorable.

"Money Talks" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, January 1962), for which Fred Dannay had paid Woolrich $200 the previous year, is a pathetically weak imitation of Damon Runyon, set on the Jersey boardwalk like several of Woolrich's pulp classics. Al Bunker, a small-time hustler on parole, lifts the cash from a seaside concession booth and caches it inside a grape-drink dispenser before he's caught. At his parole revocation hearing, which ranks among the stupidest of Woolrich's many Stupid Trial sequences, the defense is taken over by Al's brother-in-law, a seedy medico, who uses some deviously applied itching powder to "prove" that Al couldn't possibly be guilty. Woolrich's original title for this yawner was "The Money Itch," and he may well have written it back in the thirties. It has never been reprinted or collected, and the miracle is that it was published at all.

But Dannay was clearly determined to do everything in his power to get Woolrich functioning as a writer again. Just for the year 1962 he revived the annual short story contest that had been an *EQMM* staple from the mid-forties through the mid-fifties, and then at once awarded Woolrich the first prize for the story he'd bought from him for $250 back in 1958 and had been keeping in his pocket ever since. In January Dannay sent Woolrich a prize check for $1,150, and a few months later published the story, "One Drop of Blood" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, April 1962), which is in the "inverted" format pioneered early in the century by R. Austin Freeman and most familiar today from the *Columbo* TV series of the seventies. A nameless young man unpremeditatedly hacks to pieces his inconveniently pregnant ex-lover with a Samurai sword, successfully (or so he thinks) covers up the crime, and then is arrested and brutally interrogated by a likewise nameless detective—who finally catches the murderer's one little slip and crucifies him with it. The story is so carefully written that one senses the meticulous Dannay standing over Woolrich's shoulder throughout, but manages to be genuinely *noir*, and very much like the 1938 Noir Cop tale "You Take Ballistics," in its use of the strategy of divided reaction: at one moment we want the clever cop to hang this smug, selfish and brutal young killer, and the next moment we want this trapped young man who killed in a frenzy of passion to outwit the sadistic detective and get away clean. Woolrich's notions of police procedure are as laughable as ever (unless you think forensic science can't detect huge gouts of blood on a wall underneath a fresh coat of paint), but the emotional charge of the story is far from a dud.

The third and last new Woolrich tale that year was not to Dannay's taste, but Santesson paid $90 for the periodical rights and ran it as the first of four Woolrich originals he purchased for *The Saint* before both the magazine and Woolrich died. "The Poker Player's Wife" (*The Saint Mystery Magazine*, October 1962) takes place in two rooms of a Manhattan hotel around 1910, a tipoff that this too was probably first intended as an episode of *Hotel Room*. Wiped out after a nightlong game of stud, compulsive gambler Joe Talbot writes a rubber check to cover his losses. His pathetically loyal wife's desperation to recover the check before it lands her man in jail leads to misery and death, but the story ends on a surprisingly upbeat note.

The only new work by Woolrich to appear in 1963 was "Story To Be Whispered" (*The Saint Mystery Magazine*, May 1963), a simple and unsuspenseful piece for which Santesson had paid $100. The tale is set in San Francisco on a Saturday night in the late 1920s and narrated, from the perspective of twenty years later, by a young man from the sticks who comes to the big city, sets out to pick up a woman on the street, makes a play for a young lady he meets, drinks Prohibition gin with her, is invited to her sleazy room—and inexplicably beats her to death at the point of intercourse. The text as published in *The Saint* leaves his motivation murky, but the version included two years later in Woolrich's collection *The Dark Side of Love* clears up the matter in a paragraph oozing with Woolrich's contempt for himself.

> But it wasn't as though I had killed another man. Or even (God forbid) as if I had killed a woman. Or yet (banish the thought) killed a little child. All I had killed was a queer.

The year that story first came out, a native Californian named Ron Goulart (b.1933) was living in Manhattan and trying to launch a writing career. "I made it a point," he wrote in a recent memoir (*Twilight Zone*, November-December 1984), "to attend the monthly Mystery Writers of America cocktail parties, which I went to in order to meet girls, editors, or famous writers." On this particular autumn evening, he noticed across the room "a gaunt man, about sixty, sandy-haired, wearing a double-breasted tan suit and two-tone shoes. He looked like a ghost from the 1940s. . . ." It was Woolrich. Goulart crossed the room to introduce himself. For the next few months, he says, he was part of that haunted man's circle of familiars.

> All the meetings I had with him took place in saloons, usually East Side bistros with the initials P.J. in their names. There was also a cocktail lounge in his hotel. When he didn't have anyplace else to go, he'd sit there and get quietly drunk. He told me one evening that the hotel staff looked after him very well and that when he was no longer able to walk, the bartender and the elevator man always saw to it that he got safely up to his room.

But after a while Woolrich got to be a pain. "His forlorn calls to join him at some saloon where he was drinking alone became annoying. I felt sorry for him and was appalled by the way he was slowly and stubbornly destroying himself, but I got bored. It was like somebody on a ledge who's threatening to jump—somebody who's been out there for, say, six or seven weeks." Goulart soon drifted out of touch, went back to California and eventually became known as perhaps the funniest science-fiction writer in the business.

Woolrich continued to drink, brood and, very infrequently, publish something. For each new tale of his that came out, several old ones were revived—two apiece in *EQMM*, *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, *The Saint* and *Mike Shayne* during 1963 alone. Thanks to more movie and TV money, and to a new paperback edition of *The Black Curtain* from the recently launched Collier Books, his income for the year shot back up to $14,000. Continued financial security didn't make him any happier. In December he turned sixty.

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Woolrich attended MWA awards dinners only rarely and wasn't even a dues-paying member of the organization, but he was something of a living legend and did drop in on the group's monthl cocktail parties when he was in the mood to drink in company rathe than alone. It was at such a gathering in or around 1964 that freelanc writer Lou Ellen Davis got to meet him. Over the next few years the saw one another perhaps half a dozen times. "I thought he was ver sweet and kind of lonely and I felt sorry for him," she said in our 198 interview, "and he just thrived on people feeling sorry for him." H told her all sorts of false stories about his life and probably a few tru ones as well. He even talked freely with her about his own writing, bu what he said, or more precisely what she remembers him as havin said, intermingled truth and lies with the same abandon one finds i his statements about himself. "He said that he wrote under Willia Irish because he wanted to save Cornell Woolrich for when he wrot something that would really be wonderful. But he didn't want to d mysteries, he wanted to do serious novels. . . . He said that he didn' respect the mysteries, that he wanted to do serious writing. . . ." As i his suspense fiction both old and new weren't still being publishe under the Woolrich byline! But clearly at the start of his sevent decade his self-division and self-contempt were strong as ever.

He did seem interested in changing the nature of his creative lif and perhaps that of his personal life as well. Lou Ellen Davi remembers another woman writer mentioning having had an affai with Woolrich around this time, and talk of threats against Woolric by another man who was involved with the same woman. Publicis Anita Helen Brooks, who occasionally went drinking with Woolrich in Greenwich Village, says that she "didn't know him in the Biblical sense, though it wasn't from his want of trying." And he told Don Yates "that he had had bar girls that he would have relations with . . . who would comfort him." Clearly Woolrich wanted others to think of him as heterosexual, but he was such a compulsive distortionist that, to paraphrase the last line of his 1945 story "The Man Upstairs," even when he's telling the truth no one can believe him.

In our 1987 interview Yates recounted another yarn Woolrich had spun for him. "He said that a woman he had met in a bar under certain circumstances produced a great sense of guilt in him. He sort of smiled in a bitter way when he told me this story. . . . He said he went to a bar, around Manhattan, some new place . . . but he saw a girl at the bar, and she seemed attractive from a distance. He couldn't tell entirely what she looked like. So he . . . came up beside her and asked if he could buy her a drink. She turned to him, and he was looking at the wife that he had married and walked out on. That was the gist of the story. And he was taking on himself the responsibility for that innocent, . . . virginal, giving, kind, loving woman— He was taking on the responsibility for putting her into a life of prostitution." In fact we know that Gloria Blackton hadn't ended up this way at all, that she had married again and that her second marriage had been, in her half-sister Marian Trimble's words, "a beautiful and happy one." On any subject under the sun, we trust Woolrich's unsupported word at our peril.

One evening in 1964 Woolrich somehow dropped in on a gathering of scientists and science-fiction writers calling themselves The Hydra Club. Hans Santesson was at the meeting but hadn't brought Woolrich with him. Also in attendance was an intense and rebellious young writer named Harlan Ellison (b.1934) who was soon to become one of the science-fiction giants of his generation. "I wandered around," Ellison wrote in a 1975 memoir, "and finally found myself sitting on the sofa next to a weary-looking old man in an easy chair. Marvelous conversationalist. We talked for almost an hour, until I got up and went to the kitchen. . . . I described the old man and asked who he was." It was Santesson who told him that he'd been talking to Cornell Woolrich.

> My mouth must have fallen open. I had been sitting next to one of the giants of mystery fiction, a man whose work I'd read and admired for twenty years, since I'd been a kid. . . .
>
> Cornell Woolrich!
>
> Jeeeezus, if Hans had said I was sitting next to Ernest fucking Hemingway it couldn't have collapsed me more thoroughly. . . . Cornell goddam Woolrich! I damn near fainted.
>
> "But I thought he'd died *years* ago," I said. . . .
>
> I was flabbergasted. I'd sat and *talked* with Cornell Woolrich, one of my earliest writing heroes, and hadn't even known it. I wanted to find him in that crowded apartment and just be *near* him for a while longer.
>
> They were bemused by my goshwow attitude, but they were also a little perplexed. Hans said, "I do not remember seeing him here. Where is he?"
>
> And I led them back to the easy chair in the far rear corner of the room. And he was gone. And he was nowhere in the apartment. And no one else had talked to him. And I never saw him again. . . .
>
> To this day, I've felt there was something strange and pivotal in my meeting with Woolrich. He could not possibly have known who I was, nor could he have much cared. But we talked writing, and I was the only one who saw or talked to him that night. I'm sure of that. Don't ask me how I know, I cannot give you a rational explanation; and I firmly do *not* believe in ghosts or astrology or UFO's or much else of the

> nonsense gobbledygook that people substitute for the ability to handle reality. But from the time I left him in that easy chair till the moment I went back to find him, I was right in front of the only exit from that apartment and *there was no way he could have gotten past me without my seeing him.*

Ellison's 1975 story "Tired Old Man" is a fictionalized version of the encounter, but we still have to wonder whether his nonfiction version is a true account or whether he reworked it until it had taken on the shape of a Woolrich annihilation story.

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Woolrich continued to do well in the reprint markets during 1964, with one old pulper picked up by *EQMM*, two each by *Ellery Queen's Anthology* and *The Saint*, and a sixth by *Mike Shayne*, plus a new Collier Books paperback edition of *The Bride Wore Black*, with an enthusiastic introduction by Anthony Boucher, and a new edition of the 1956 collection *Nightmare* in Dell's Great Mystery Library paperback series. His income for the year, almost all of it from book royalties, amounted to just over $9,000. But the only new Woolrich material printed that year was a quartet of feeble efforts which Fred Dannay had bought from him between 1958 and 1963.

"Working Is for Fools" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, March 1964) is a pointless rehash, in radio-script form, of Woolrich's 1936 pulper "Dilemma of the Dead Lady," better known as "Wardrobe Trunk." Dannay, as we've seen, had permitted Woolrich to substitute this item for the 1930 "Soda Fountain Saga" when a legal dispute developed over ownership of the latter tale. The only point of interest about the radio script is that it's some evidence for the view that Woolrich himself had written the scripts for a few of the *Suspense* episodes based on his stories.

Even less interesting is the short-short of the late fifties which Woolrich had called "The Jazz Record" and sold in January 1960 to the French magazine *Constellation*. Dannay paid $150 for U.S. magazine rights three and a half years later and ran the tale as "Steps . . . Coming Near" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, April 1964). It's an occult vignette in which a father and his teenage daughter hear death moans on the latest phonograph record of a pop singer who, it turns out, has just died. That's all there is to this quickie. If Woolrich's financial accounts didn't prove that he was the author, I wouldn't have believed it.

In the spring of 1963, Woolrich had sent Dannay a story he called "Four Sides to the Affair" along with a brief covering letter.

> F.—
> This is the jealousy-story I mentioned to you on the phone awhile back. It concludes the collection of love-stories I've been working on.
> It may not be for you, but at least I want to be able to say afterwards I showed it to you.

Dannay had liked it enough to offer $300, but as usual didn't like the author's title and came up with one of his own. "When Love Turns" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, June 1964) is nominally set in France—although there is no local detail and everyone in the story talks like a New Yorker—and, like so many of his late stories, deals with the death of a person as the fruit of the death of love. The statuesquely beautiful Fabienne is married to the wise old philanderer Boniface but has fallen desperately in love with the younger and more passionate Gilles. When she learns that Gilles has taken a new and youthful mistress, she goes to his apartment to kill him while he's in bed with the new woman in his life—who turns out to be the new woman in Boniface's life too. *C'est Paris, c'est la vie, c'est l'amour.* Dannay apparently found a few holes in the story and helped Woolrich patch them up, for which he received the following note:

> Dear Fred—
> It's a pleasure to work with you.
> That's why you're known as the world's greatest living editor.
> Cornell

The last Woolrich tale for the year was "Murder After Death" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, December 1964), for which Dannay had paid $250 in August 1962. It's another story of a loser at the game of love turning to crime for emotional revenge, but the protagonist this time is an uncharacteristically repulsive lout, and an idiot to boot. Georg Mohler loses the lovely and wealthy Delphine to law student Reed Holcomb. When Delphine dies a sudden but natural death, Mohler cooks up a supernally dumb plot to sneak into the funeral parlor, inject poison into her body and frame Holcomb for murder. Woolrich borrows his climax yet again from the ironic ending of Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* but handles the details even more sloppily and implausibly than usual. However, the scene where Mohler hides in the funeral home and posthumously poisons his lover's corpse is a gem of poetic horror.

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In 1964 the sight in Woolrich's right eye began to fail. Donald Yates and his then wife had spent much of the year in Argentina on a research project but saw Woolrich on a brief visit to New York. He "very nearly went to Argentina for an eye operation in January of 1965," Yates wrote in his memoir of the author. "He said he needed the operation. He claimed he had heard there were good eye specialists in Argentina. I told him he was more than welcome to be our guests, and we began to make plans. Things began to bog down when he found he needed to renew his passport. And when I couldn't free myself from business engagements long enough to take him around to the places he needed to go to make his plans—his eyesight was poor, and he wouldn't go out on the street alone—he slowly let the air out of the project. Later, in the States, he was operated on successfully for cataract."

Lou Ellen Davis visited him in the hospital and brought him a stuffed mouse with polka-dot ears to cheer him up, but it wasn't quite the gift he was looking for. "I remember he was trying to get the people who came to see him in the hospital to bring him alcohol," she told me. After his discharge he had a few people over to his hotel room for a party, the only known occasion on which he hosted anything. The stuffed mouse, Davis says, was sitting on a windowsill. "I brought him walnuts and a nutcracker for a present," she said, and got for her pains a cutting remark from Woolrich "about how he couldn't see to pick up the nuts."

At the end of April 1965 Woolrich felt spry enough to attend the MWA Awards Dinner at the Biltmore Hotel. Being Woolrich, he didn't bother to purchase a ticket in advance or to dress or even shave for the banquet. Gloria Amoury, then MWA's executive secretary, described in a 1981 letter to Don Yates how "an unshaven man dressed in a sports shirt and no tie showed up at the Biltmore just before we marched into the ballroom . . . and said, 'I'm Cornell Woolrich. I have no reservation and no ticket but I was told you might be kind enough to let me buy one now and seat me.'" It was the only time in Amoury's near twenty-years' tenure with MWA that "*anyone* brought off the feat of turning up at our always-oversubscribed-in-advance bash in such a fashion, and getting the best seat available."

It was probably that same week when Woolrich had his first and only meeting with the critic who, earlier and with more enthusiasm than anyone else in the field, had recognized Woolrich's unique gifts and praised them again and again in his review columns. Anthony Boucher died before he could tell of the encounter but his widow, Phyllis White, was with him at the time and remembers it well.

> One evening in New York in 1965 we were in a restaurant with some MWA members after a private viewing of a film. As the group began to disperse, [*EQMM* managing editor]

> Clayton Rawson told us that before going home he was going to drop in on Cornell Woolrich, who was convalescing from surgery, and he suggested that we come along. Of course Tony was thrilled at the prospect. We went to the hotel room where Woolrich was temporarily quartered. One eye had been operated on and he was to go back after an interval for an operation on the other. Hans Stefan Santesson was there trying to look after him. He was supposed to go easy on drinking so he was sticking to wine. Santesson kept suggesting pleasantly but ineffectively that he slow down. The room had until recently been used for storage of furniture. It was in good enough condition except for lacerated wallpaper. Woolrich complained that the hotel staff was sneering and laughing at him behind his back. Rawson asked Woolrich whether he had anything lying around that would be suitable for reprint in *EQMM*. Woolrich rummaged around and turned up something. There was a bit of comic pantomime in which Rawson started to look at the story and then tried to hide it from rival editor Santesson peering over his shoulder. The only dramatic incident of the evening was missed by Rawson, who had to leave to catch his train. The door opened suddenly and a crowing man burst in with a girl and a bottle. The hotel had mistakenly sent him to that room and he was indignant on finding us there. Santesson attempted detente, ending with the grand climax: ". . . and this—is CORNELL WOOLRICH." The man stated that he was an American and not any kind of foreigner. The intruders withdrew, leaving Woolrich convinced that this was another part of the conspiracy against him. Eventually we left but it wasn't easy. Woolrich thought that people who went away, no matter how long they had stayed, were leaving because they didn't like him. Tony was delighted that he had finally met Woolrich, and at the same time thought that it wouldn't do his own nerves any good to see too much of him. . . .

fact they never met again. But apparently the cataract surgery was success, for the handwriting in the 1937 desk diary Woolrich used as business ledger becomes noticeably more clear and firm in the cond half of 1965.

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After recuperating from his operations Woolrich moved into the last tel room of his life. The Sheraton-Russell is a quietly elegant artment hotel at 45 Park Avenue, on the corner of 37th Street. oolrich's final home was a comfortable if spartan suite on the second floor. Don Yates, who continued to visit him whenever he came to Ne York, described the suite in his 1987 interview with me.

> As you face the hotel from across the street . . . it would be on the extreme left corner. It consisted of a large sitting room in which there was a screen that he'd drawn across. A very small kind of a kitchen which was adjacent to the corridor outside. On the wall facing 37th Street was a sofa and a coffee table in front of it. . . . Looking out over south Park Avenue was a writing table and a lamp. There was a TV in the corner to the right of the writing table, and a few occasional chairs, [and] a closet which he seemed always to keep locked, next to the kitchenette. And then, occupying the space between the sitting room and the 37th Street end of his apartment were, on the right, a small bathroom, and on the left, at the very corner, his bedroom. I never saw a book in his apartment. Never saw any kind of reading material, not a magazine, not a newspaper.

Soon after settling in he wrote Fred Dannay a note on hote stationery, giving him the new address. "Sorry to move around s much. I don't deserve this final ignominy. Wish it were over." What h found ignominious about the place we can only guess. He did stil write now and then, but left unfinished a great deal more than h completed. What did he do when the darkness fell? "From six o'cloc on," said rooms manager Maria Garcia, who was interviewed b Munich-based filmmaker Christian Bauer for his Woolrich documentary, "every night, every evening," he would come down from th second floor and be, as she put it, "part of the lobby." Sitting in th same chair every evening, looking out the front door and window a the street lights, saying nothing, doing nothing. A few of the olde waiters in the hotel dining room remember how he would come in an sit at a table in an alcove where almost no one could see him an quietly eat his dinner. He struck the waiters as a very shy man, bu after he got used to a particular server he would be more friendly After midnight, when the lobby closed down, he would return to hi room, Don Yates told me in our interview, and "sit up late at night an watch late movies. And I know he would look for his old movies [tha is, the ones based on his novels and stories] and see them over an over again." Mike Avallone had it right: Woolrich in the sixties was a walking dead man.

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For most of his career he had been represented either by himself or a variety of literary and media agents like H.N. Swanson. In 1964 he signed with the well-known Scott Meredith agency, and one of the first results of the agreement was the sale of a book to Simon & Schuster, which had published the three earliest Black novels before the falling out between Woolrich and Lee Wright. *The Ten Faces of Cornell Woolrich*, released in April 1965, was not a novel but an assortment of well-above-average short stories, selected mainly from previous Woolrich collections, and with an appreciative if not too informative introduction by Fred Dannay, to whom the book was dedicated. Among the seven tales resurrected from earlier volumes were at least three classics: 1936's "The Night Reveals," "Debt of Honor" (Dannay's title for the 1938 "I.O.U.—One Life") and the 1939 "Men Must Die"/ "Guillotine," here retitled "Steps Going Up." The three newly collected stories were the 1936 "Double Feature," retitled "The Most Exciting Show in Town"; 1940's "Finger of Doom," retitled "I Won't Take a Minute"; and the recent "One Drop of Blood," which Dannay didn't need to find a new title for since he'd published it in the first place. The back of the collection's dust jacket featured an excellent if idealized sketch of Woolrich by artist John Gaughan. Five years had passed since the last new Woolrich book of any sort and seven since the last hardcover, but critical reaction to *The Ten Faces* was at best restrained, and even Boucher gagged at the overfamiliarity of most of the selections. "Much though I admire the work of Cornell Woolrich/ William Irish, I can see little excuse for [this volume]. . . . The stories, to be sure, range from good to excellent, but this can hardly claim to be a new $3.95 book." The collection sold poorly and has never been reprinted.

A few months later came the year's second volume of Woolrich short stories and the last new title under any of his bylines to appear in his lifetime. *The Dark Side of Love*, subtitled "Tales of Love and Death," was the "collection of love-stories" Woolrich had mentioned to Fred Dannay in the spring of 1963. It was purchased for a laughable $600 advance in October 1964 by Walker & Co., a new and then marginal publishing house specializing in cheaply made U.S. editions of English detective fiction. Most of its eight stories were unsold to magazines and probably unsaleable. To make things worse, the book's copyright page proclaims that it was printed from type set in Austria, which was a blatant confession that the publisher had violated the domestic manufacture requirements of the Copyright Act, with the result that all new matter in the collection risked being thrown into the public domain. In his brief review for the *New York Times*, Boucher remarked that the book "stresses [Woolrich's] weaknesses rather than his virtues." But it also gives us a concentrated dose of how the world looked to him as he approached death.

Fittingly enough in view of its theme, the collection is dedicated to no one and opens with a bleak quotation from poet W.H. Auden: "The more they love,/The more they feel alone." The first story in the book is "Je t'Aime," which Dannay had run in *EQMM* the year before as "When Love Turns." Next comes "The Clean Fight," the last Woolrich story with police protagonists and one of the strongest. As in his Noir Cop classics, the officers are portrayed as gods (that is, malign thugs) with badges and licenses to kill. The setting is a pair of hotel rooms—could this be another excised chapter from Woolrich's 1958 episodic novel?—and we watch a team of cops carrying out a plan to murder in cold blood a terrified wretch who had been remotely responsible for the death of the beloved squad commander's only son. The religious language and overtones hint that God the Father and his archangels are avenging themselves on Judas for the betrayal of Jesus. By all normal standards the story is ridiculous—in three years none of the police assassins can figure a way to knock off their victim!—but Woolrich's intense evocations stifle critical thought.

The third tale in the collection, "The Idol with the Clay Bottom," dates back at least to 1944. In a letter of that year to anthologist Frank Owen, who turned it down for publication, Woolrich had said: "They don't come any more Rabelaisian than this one." Nor screwier either. Marie, an ex-prostitute determined to start over, falls in love with Don, who as a boy was physically abused by his sadistic stepmother. They plan to marry but Marie is terrified that she'll lose him if she admits she used to be a whore. Finally, just when she's almost worked up the nerve to tell him, a tavern barmaid accidentally whacks Don's rear end with a tray. His face suddenly suffused with ecstasy, he screams at the maid to hit him again. Marie disgustedly walks out.

> He got up on one knee and called out to her. "Marie! Wait! Don't run out on me! Don't leave me!"
>
> "Geddaway from me!" she shrilled back rabidly. "You're queer for paddy whacks!" And again she ran, ran until he was out of sight and out of her life.

She returns to prostitution and one of her steady customers seems to be falling in love with her as the story ends. All we can say for sure about this wretched waste of ink is that at the time he wrote it Woolrich's own "queer" side must have plunged him into the depths of self-revulsion.

The next three stories had all appeared in print before in one form or another: "The Poker Player's Wife" and "Story To Be Whispered" in *The Saint* (although the ending of the latter tale is much clearer in the book version), and "Somebody Else's Life" in the 1959 collection *Beyond the Night*, as the TV script "Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life." Recasting the teleplay into prose didn't improve it.

These were followed by "I'm Ashamed," another previously unpublished tale of sexual-psychological horror, in which high-schooler Bruce Neil goes downtown with his buddy Warren for some Saturday night fun and the two boys wind up losing their virginity in a brothel. The next morning Bruce discovers that his whore's last customer before him had been his father, and in a fit of shame he hangs himself. This quiet slice of hell is evoked in vivid imagery ("The street-lamps on their tall hooked posts spit violet-white needles of light drowsily upon the roadway") of a sort rarely encountered in Woolrich's final tales. The perverse story line and the protagonist trapped by a sense of sin can perhaps be read as correlatives for the special agonies of the homosexual whose religious roots are Catholic.

The collection closes with "Too Nice a Day to Die," a faultless gem of *noir*, its facets perfectly reflecting a world in which chance is god and beams fall. Desperately lonely Laurel Hammond turns on the gas in her New York apartment one morning, ready to end her life. The phone rings, and from force of habit she opens the windows and picks up the receiver. It's a wrong number, someone wanting Schultz's Delicatessen. The absurdity gives her the will to live a single day longer. She goes out, walks around the city, and thanks to the long arm of chance or fate meets a man in Rockefeller Plaza who seems to be as right for her as she seems to be for him. Then comes the third beam: as they're on the way back to her place for dinner, she is run down while crossing the road and dies. The world according to Woolrich has rarely been rendered in such fitting form.

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While *The Dark Side of Love* was at the printers, Scott Meredith agents sold "The Idol with the Clay Bottom" to the men's magazine *Knight* and both "One Drop of Blood" and "Too Nice a Day to Die" to the short-lived new suspense-horror periodical *Bizarre. EQMM, Ellery Queen's Anthology, The Saint* and *Mike Shayne* each reprinted a Woolrich story during 1965, and Collier Books added the 1942 *Black Alibi* to its paperback series. Thanks to reprint sales and continuing media interest in the *noir* classics of Woolrich's prime, he never had to worry about where the next drink was coming from. His total income for the year topped the $18,000 mark despite the fact that he was writing next to nothing.

Every now and then he would make a feeble effort to break out of the box in which he'd locked himself, but each time he'd abort the plan in its final stages. Don Yates invited him to East Lansing, Michigan, for the 1966 Memorial Day weekend. In a letter dated April 30 and handwritten on Sheraton-Russell stationery, Woolrich more or less accepted.

> Donny-Boy—
>
> Thanks.
>
> I'll try to make it for the Decoration Day week-end, say like June One.
>
> Should I give up my pad here, and then just keep going after my stop-over at Lansing?
>
> Give me some advice. I'm not secure. Should I take a chance?
>
> I'm not happy here. I'll have to get a new passport if I do shove off though.
>
> I want to come by Trailways bus. Give me the shove I need. Rig up a schedule of some kind (of theirs) and send it on to me. Exact times and stop-overs and changes, etc. Funny how helpless you can get. Like a kid almost.
>
> Con

Few readers will be surprised to learn that he never showed up. "This time," Yates told me, "the plans foundered because the Trailways line didn't serve Lansing. That was his explanation."

Later in 1966 he pulled the same stunt again. When Yates wrote asking permission to use his 1939 classic "Men Must Die"/"Guillotine" in an anthology of mystery fiction in Spanish translation, Woolrich readily agreed, but in return, he said in his reply letter, "do me a favor. Write back and give me the name of the best hotel in Lansing, so I'll know where to make my reservation when I'm ready to come out. I imagine around Thanksgiving would be a nice time. It's not too cold out there then, is it?" History repeated itself: he never came. Late in November he sent Yates a Christmas card with a quintessential Woolrich message.

> Hello, Pal.
>
> Sometimes I miss you. Sometimes I don't.
>
> Cornell

The briefest excursion out of New York seemed to terrify him as much as a trip halfway across the country. Over and over again Fred Dannay would invite Woolrich to spend a Sunday afternoon with him and his wife in Larchmont, which is forty minutes by train from Grand Central Station. Woolrich might answer with a yes or a no or a maybe, but he never came once.

Miraculously, he still managed to write a little and, thanks to Dannay and Santesson, to sell what he wrote. There were no new paperback editions of any Woolrich novel during 1966, but *EQMM* and *Mike Shayne* reprinted one thirties pulper each and *Ellery Queen's Anthology* and *The Saint* ran two each. Thanks again mainly to overseas and media money, he made more than $12,500 that year despite having only two new stories published in the entire twelve months.

"It Only Takes a Minute to Die" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, July 1966) is a perfect Woolrich title, much better indeed than the story that goes with it, for which Dannay had paid $300 in mid-1965. Judged purely on its plot it's a routine exercise in the inverted form of "One Drop of Blood," with X killing Y in the first part of the tale and getting tripped up in the second by The One Little Detail He Overlooked. (That detail, a telephone book, was Dannay's idea, not Woolrich's. The correspondence between editor and author shows that Dannay found a gaggle of plot flaws in the manuscript as originally submitted, and suggested ways to eliminate them. Woolrich rewrote the end of the story in his own handwriting on eight sheets of Sheraton-Russell stationery, and with minor stylistic changes by Dannay, the published version follows Woolrich's revisions.) But thematically the story fits within the *noir* universe from the first page with its echo of Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado."

> Why he wanted to kill him need not be brought within the compass of this story. . . . All that need be said is that he wanted to kill him, he did kill him, and he botched it—and now let the story begin.

The murderer's name is Killare, the victim is called Dade, and the events of the crime are infused with religious motifs and a sort of ritualistic determinism, almost as if the two were celebrating Mass together, or making love. (The sex-death connection is exceptionally strong in the scene where Killare makes Dade undress and lie down in bed and then slowly strangles him with a pillow.) It's unfortunate that so much *noir* grotesquerie is thrown away on a perfectly ordinary plot.

"Mannequin" (*The Saint Magazine*, October 1966), which Santesson bought for $175, is a much longer and more powerful story, by far the finest of the four Woolrich originals published in *The Saint*. Its first half is a brilliant set-piece of suspense as Leone, a low-ranking model for a Paris fashion designer, is shadowed day and night for no discernible reason by a barely glimpsed menace. Only after several thousand words of pulsating terror-in-the-everyday does she learn that her lover has escaped from prison and that her shadow is a Javert figure who expects the fugitive to take refuge with her. The ending is as bitter and tragic as one expects in Woolrich, and the spirit is so close to that of the original French *films noirs* of the late thirties that one half suspects the story was written at that time and kept in Woolrich's files until almost three decades later.

• • •

On a visit to New York in the spring of 1967, Don Yates "had a glimpse into one of the dark pits" that made up the Woolrich world. "It was a long, confusing night," he says in his memoir, but what he remembers about it most vividly is Woolrich's claim that he was "being followed, persecuted" by another resident on the second floor of the Sheraton-Russell.

> [T]his man, whom everybody else trusted, was after Con Woolrich for something that Con didn't find out the nature of. When [Woolrich] left his room, he was sure that the man had come into the room and searched it. What he was searching for, he never knew. He never caught him in the room but lived in mortal fear of this man discovering something.
>
> He said the man had women in his own room, which was apparently some kind of condemnation of the fellow. He said he saw him later, in a restaurant, and the man acted very friendly then to him.
>
> The way he told the story, it seemed to me as real as anything else in his life. Of course, it's the kind of nightmarish concoction that he would devise for so many of his stories. It may have been that he worked with the theme too long, and somehow it passed . . . into his own existence. It made no sense. He said that he knew the man was elusive, and he could never pin him down and find out what he was doing. But he knew something was after him for a long time that terrified him.

During that same spring Woolrich probably wrote and certainly sold the last suspense story of his life, and by a curious coincidence it deals with a nameless and lonely man on the second floor of a New York hotel room who is being hounded for reasons unknown by Them. Could Woolrich have been playing a game with Yates, transforming that story into a sort of dramatic monologue? Yates didn't think so. "I don't know if that man existed or not," he told me in our 1987 interview. "But Cornell felt helpless to defuse what this man was doing. As if he had some supernatural power and could come and go and disappear and abuse the sanctity of his hotel room. He was angry when he thought about that man having come into his room and searched it while he was gone. He was absolutely physically showing the signs of anger. So it seemed to be real to me, in his own mind. Whether it was real or not, nobody knows."

If 1967 was a year of paranoid nightmare for Woolrich the man, it was a time of revival for Woolrich the writer. Not only did Fred

Dannay reprint three more of his pulpers (one in *EQMM*, two in *Ellery Queen's Anthology*) and Hans Santesson run another pair in *The Saint*, but three separate book publishers reissued a trio of classic Woolrich novels. W.W. Norton offered a hardcover edition of *Phantom Lady*, Paperback Library a softcover of *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, and Ace Books a paperback of *The Bride Wore Black*, the first of four titles from the Black Series which the company would put out over a two-year period. That multi-book deal was made by a Scott Meredith agent assigned in June 1967 to the Woolrich account, an obscure young Jewish intellectual who on the surface had nothing in common with his client but in fact was to develop a deep affinity with the man of darkness.

Barry N. Malzberg (b.1939) had a literary-academic background and a strong ambition to have short stories published in highbrow quarterlies like *The Hudson Review*. All he collected from those journals was rejection slips. Frustrated and hungry, he had taken a job with the Meredith agency as a manuscript reader and was soon promoted to representing a few writers, among them Woolrich. He met that by now wretched and wasted old man, began reading his work, and became both entranced and obsessed. Part of his interest of course was professional—being caught up in Woolrich's world made him a better salesman—but his involvement went way beyond the demands of his job. Just as Scott Fitzgerald and what he stood for had ensnared the young Woolrich and dozens of writers of the Woolrich generation, so Malzberg was ensnared by the old Woolrich and the hopelessness with which he saw the world. Perhaps for the first time in his life, that doom-haunted recluse had found a kindred spirit. He felt death coming closer and closer but what he feared even more than death, he told Malzberg that year, was "the endless obliteration, the knowledge that there will never be anything else. That's what I can't stand, to try so hard and to end in nothing." It was as though he believed that if only his writing were good enough he wouldn't have to die. In a powerful chapter included in his book *The Engines of the Night* (1982), Malzberg gives us vivid glimpses of Woolrich's last years, of how he "lived alone . . . on the second floor of the Sheraton-Russell Hotel . . . surrounded by cases and cases of beer cans and bottles of whiskey and invited the staff to come up and drink beer with him and watch television. Sometimes he would sit in the lobby, more occasionally he would take a cab to McSorley's Tavern" in the Village. His life had crumbled into a pit of alcohol and despair.

His 1967 income totaled less than $8,000 and his record of newly published work added up to two stories, neither within shouting distance of his best. The tale he called "The Synthetic Sleeping-Partner" had been purchased by Dannay for a generous $425 in the summer of 1966, when adultery was still the only ground for divorce in the state of New York, but by press time the law had been substantially liberalized. Dannay ran the story in two installments as "Divorce—New York Style" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, June and July 1967), with a brief preface about the obsolescence of its premise. Steve Dunne, his estranged wife and their lawyers set up the degrading phony-raid-on-love-nest routine which, before the change in the law, was the standard method of establishing adultery in New York courts. But an unseen hand rewrites the script so that, just minutes after the raiding party leaves the hotel room with the photographic evidence, the woman hired to pose for the cameras in bed with Steve is found dead between the sheets. Probably not one of *EQMM*'s hundreds of thousands of readers recognized the situation as a criminous offshoot of Woolrich's 1936 *Breezy Stories* romance "Pick Up the Pieces," or suspected that this "latest" Woolrich whodunit might well have been thirty or more years old. If the tale indeed dates back that far, one can understand why it had taken so long to sell. Woolrich does nothing to develop the premise effectively and makes us settle for a tame, flat story without suspense or detection or interesting characters or emotional fever or *noir* coloration or anything at all to keep us involved. The murder method (nitrobenzene in a bucket of ice cubes) harks back to the Rube Goldberg killing devices in his thirties pulpers, and the plot details are unforgivably sloppy, with the murderer turning out to have put together all the paraphernalia for the crime at a time when he had no motive and no hope of opportunity! The story has not been included in any subsequent volume of Woolrich's work, and isn't likely to be.

A few months later, in the penultimate issue before his mystery magazine folded, Hans Santesson published a much more rewarding Woolrich tale for which he'd paid a paltry $85. "Intent to Kill" (*The Saint Magazine*, September 1967) is strikingly reminiscent of Woolrich's 1946 classic "The Light in the Window," only this time it's a psychotic veteran of Vietnam—perhaps the first of his kind in crime fiction—who returns to New York and moves through the night streets like a zombie, bent on ritually murdering his wife for one sexual transgression while he was overseas. No one but Woolrich could pack so many wild coincidences into such a tissue-thin story line, but the *noir* overtones are genuine and the first-person narration believably over the edge. At the climax the wife commits suicide under circumstances that convince the husband, first, that he'll be convicted of her murder and, second, that, having *intended* to kill her, he deserves to be convicted. This denouement clearly springs from the distinctive Catholic teaching that one who intends but doesn't actually commit a mortal sin is damned in eternal hellfire equally with one who goes through with the deed. Where Woolrich picked up this moral tidbit we don't know, whether he believed it himself we don't know, but as a tool to divide our reaction and reflect his protagonist's madness it works like a charm.

• • •

During 1967 Woolrich's slow march to the grave quickened into a fast walk. An ill-fitting shoe led to a bad case of gangrene which "untreated," as Malzberg put it, "turned his leg to charcoal." His life became even more zombielike than before. He "would stay in his room and drink almost all the time and stare at the television looking for a film from one of his novels or short stories which came on often enough and usually after 2 A.M.; between the movies and the alcohol he was finally able to find sleep. For a few hours. Until ten or eleven in the morning. When it would all start again."

This was Woolrich's life, if you want to call it living, until the first week of 1968. "At the end," Malzberg writes, "amidst the cases and the bottles and the empty glasses as the great black leg became turgid and began to stink there was nothing at all. The television did not help, the whiskey left no stain, the bellhops could not bring distraction." As Don Yates recalls what Woolrich later told him, it was "the bellboy who used to bring him his beer" who "realized that something had to be done" and called a doctor. As Mike Avallone remembers it, the credit belongs to Robert L. Fish, who "almost saved Cornell Woolrich's leg from amputation. . . . But Cornell had procrastinated too long and when Bob saw the pus-stained, damaged foot . . . and alerted the hotel doctor, he was perhaps a day too late. We were all at MWA headquarters waiting for Fish to show up so the board meeting could get underway when Bob burst in, unhappy, delivering the news. . . ." On or around January 10 Woolrich was carried out of the Sheraton-Russell and taken to Wickersham Hospital, where his leg was cut off above the knee.

And there in the hospital occurred the last of the many incidents in Woolrich's life whose full dimensions will never be understood. One of the Wickersham chaplains was a priest from the nearby Church of St. John the Baptist. According to Edwin Singer, Woolrich stopped the priest in the hospital corridor one day and said: "Father, I'd like to talk to you. I was born into the [Catholic] faith, and I left the faith, and I'd like to get back in the faith." To which the priest replied: "No problem with that, son. I'll hear your confession, give you absolution, and we'll also give you extreme unction so that you get well." As Singer remembers Woolrich's account of it, he made his confession and received communion either that day or the next. When Singer asked what had motivated him, Woolrich said that he had reached the age where he was hearing "Nearer My God to Thee." Singer, a devout Catholic himself, remembers Woolrich afterward as a placid and subdued man, resigned to the loss of his leg and perhaps to the coming end of his life.

Woolrich was released from the hospital until the stump of his leg had healed and was readmitted in April for the fitting of a prosthesis. That month, while still at Wickersham, he received "a breezy two-page letter" from his younger pulp contemporary Steve Fisher, who was still in Hollywood and had not been in touch for almost twenty years, since the time he'd solicited Woolrich's advice on how to end the *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* movie script. The letter was forwarded to the hospital and Woolrich replied "in a large loose scrawl" on the reverse sides of Fisher's pages.

> Hello Steve—
>
> It was good to hear from you. You've been in my thoughts so many times over the years. Still young, still dashing, the way we all always stay in our memories of each other. The Steve that wrote *I Wake Up Screaming*. . . .
>
> I came in here at a fast 89 pounds, and with a week left to go. And pulled through minus a gam. I'll be out as soon as my rehabilitation is complete, a little wary and a lot smarter. I'm returning to my father's religion (if they'll have me), the R.C. Not out of fear, but out of gratitude for being given a second time around. Everybody has to have somebody, and I had nobody.
>
> Lots of luck, Steve, and may everything you ever wanted come true.
>
> Cornell

What really happened, and why, is anyone's guess. A genuine instance of what Jews call *t'shuvah* and Catholics call conversion? A way of forging a last link with his long-dead father? A reflex of fright? Woolrich can't tell us and the priest won't, and it's none of our business anyway. If his father's nominal faith brought him some peace at the end, few of us would begrudge it to him.

• • •

While Woolrich was in the hospital for the second time, Dannay published the last new story Woolrich lived to see in print—and one of his best in years. "For the Rest of Her Life" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, May 1968) goes back at least to the summer of 1966, when Dannay had paid $350 for it under the title "*Now* I've Got You." It's a grim nightmare of a tale in which a young woman marries a man who turns out to be a sadistic wife-abuser. She meets another man, confesses the truth—which she says makes *her* feel ashamed—and together they try to escape. Every move they make throughout this excruciating story is precisely the wrong thing to do, and Woolrich keeps tightening the screws until we're screaming at them to change their course before it's too late. But each wrong move has also been foreordained in the womb of destiny, and Linda and Garry are the last of the innocent doomed couples whose shattered remains fill the Woolrich world. The story's climax is as dark as anything Woolrich ever wrote, and when it ends, says Harlan Ellison, "you hear your spine crack with tension."

In June Woolrich left the hospital with an artificial leg on which he could never learn to walk. His last few months were spent at the Sheraton-Russell, in a wheelchair. In a sense he had become Alan Walker, the protagonist of *Cover Charge*, who also had ended alone and with his legs useless. But at least Woolrich had the help of a magnificent hotel staff. "They came to his door with trays, snacks, food, messages, advice," Malzberg writes. "They took good care of him. They helped him down on crutches to the lobby and put him in the plush chair at the near door so that he could see the traffic from the street. . . . They brought him into the dining room and they brought him out. They took him upstairs. They took him downstairs. They stayed with him. They created a subterranean network of concern. . . ."

• • •

Thanks to their concern, Woolrich was still alive late in June when the first major theatrical film based on his work since *Rear Window* had its New York premiere. *La Mariée Etait en Noir*, directed by the renowned François Truffaut and adapted from *The Bride Wore Black*, opened on June 25 at the Festival Theatre, on 57th Street and Fifth Avenue, about a mile uptown from the Sheraton-Russell. One bright afternoon before the beginning of the picture's two-and-a-half-month run, Mike Avallone dropped in at the hotel to fetch Woolrich along to a private screening. Woolrich balked at going.

"François Truffaut will be there!" Avallone told him excitedly, for the director had made a quick trip to the States for the premiere. "You know who he is? Just about the greatest French director working today! He wants to meet the man whose work he admires so much. Come on, Cornell, I'll carry you if I have to. Don't you want to see what Truffaut did with your greatest book?" Avallone kept up the stream of cajolery and Woolrich in his wheelchair kept staring down at the floor. Finally, as Avallone recalled when interviewed for Christian Bauer's documentary, Woolrich spoke. "You're going to have to leave here, Mickey," he growled, "if you're gonna keep harping on that. I'm not going. I don't want to go." It was the first and only time Woolrich threatened to kick out a visitor; usually, as we've seen, he got angry when anyone had to leave him. In the end, Avallone said, "I left him there, still staring at the floor," and went off to the screening alone.

The movie was still playing at the Festival on July 17 when Don Yates stopped off in New York on the way back to Michigan after a year in Argentina. Having heard nothing about the leg amputation, he gave Woolrich a call as usual. "Oh, sure," Woolrich said, "come on over, I'll be waiting for you." In his 1986 interview with Mark Bassett, Yates described what happened when he reached the Sheraton-Russell.

> I went into the lobby and there he was, in a wheelchair, which took me totally by surprise. I said: "What happened?"
>
> He said: "Well, come on upstairs."
>
> We got on the elevator and went upstairs to his room . . . on the second floor.
>
> And he said: "I'm going to show you something. . . . I have a prosthetic leg now." He had lost one leg, the right leg had been amputated halfway between the thigh and the knee. And he said: "I want to show you something," and started wiggling out of his pants. He said: "I'm not making a pass at you. Understand that. I want you to take a look at this."
>
> And he pulled off the prosthetic leg and threw it across the room, as if he had great scorn for it and hatred, and said: "Look at this." And he showed me the stub of his leg. He said: "Does that look infected to you?"
>
> I said: "Well, Con, I don't know, I'm not a doctor. It does look raw, it doesn't look very healthy, but I can't tell you if it's infected or not."
>
> He said: "Well, I just wanted your idea on it. I don't know what I'm going to do about this. I hate this thing."

In his unpublished memoir of Woolrich, Yates described his own reaction and Woolrich's mood in greater detail. "I started to try to play down the seriousness of his disability because that was what he seemed eager to hear. But I was deeply concerned. And he was terrified beyond words of what was going to happen to him. I didn't comprehend it then, only later. Death had moved into that lonely hotel room. . . ." Woorich's adoption of his father's religion does not seem to have consoled him for long. On the other hand, in my own 1987 interview Yates mentioned that on this visit Woolrich was "more quiet, a little bit more resigned" than usual, so perhaps Edwin Singer's perception of a Woolrich fortified by faith for a peaceful death has some validity too. And yet there was no way, immobilized as he was, that he could get out of his hotel room to attend Mass and receive the sacraments, and he does not seem to have asked any priest to come and visit him. The mystery surrounding the religious aspect of his youth repeats itself in the mystery surrounding the religious aspect of his last months.

Yates was as eager to see Truffaut's movie version of *The Bride Wore Black* as Avallone had been three weeks before, and especially eager to see it with Woolrich beside him.

> I asked Con if he'd seen it. He said: "No, I haven't seen it." I said: "Let's go out and have a look at your movie." Con said: "We'll do that." And I thought it would be great for Woolrich to see a new movie again. What a thrill! And the evening wore on. We didn't have dinner out. He didn't have much of an appetite then. We got to talking, and he was drinking only beer, and I was having some bourbon that he bought for me. And we kept on talking and kept on talking and after a while I knew that we weren't going to go out. And I made one more reference to it, and he said: "Well, let's not bother about that." And I think [that] from the beginning, when I suggested it, he didn't want to say no but he didn't want to go, because he didn't want to leave the hotel in that wheelchair. He didn't want to be seen in a wheelchair. . . . I didn't press it any further. So I don't believe he ever had the chance to see the film.

Finally in the hours after midnight Yates said goodbye, and this time, he says in his memoir, "there were no recriminations when I said I'd like to leave." Perhaps he had an intuition that he'd never see the man again. Before he left, he asked Woolrich for a manuscript as a sort of souvenir. "So he went to his closet, unlocked it, and brought me the typescript of one of his last stories. . . ." It was the tale which he had called "*Now* I've Got You" and which had appeared in the May *EQMM* as "For the Rest of Her Life."

Yates had brought with him some of his extensive Woolrich collection—hardcover and paperback first editions, old pulp magazines in which the author's stories had been printed long ago—and now asked Woolrich to sign them for him.

> I had them in a big shirtbox from the dry cleaner's that I'd wrapped up and brought with me. That was my last request. He said: "Oh, sure, I'd be glad to do that." He said: "You can pick them up tomorrow downstairs." And there was not the bitterness in our farewell that there had been so many nights before, when he seemed terribly angry and disappointed and let down because I was going to leave him alone.
>
> So he said goodbye, and I came back the next morning, and

> there were the books, waiting for me downstairs. I checked through them and they were all signed, in his very typical and fluid hand. All the Woolrich books were signed as by Woolrich, and all the Irish books were signed as by Irish. It was a last gesture, I guess, of his sense of friendship with me. . . .

"In July, 1968," wrote Woolrich collector Bill Thailing, "I received a short note from him asking me to come and visit him before he died. I procrastinated." Had he returned to New York to say goodbye he would have found a Woolrich who looked decades older than his sixty-four years. He had, says Barry Malzberg, "the stunned aspect of the very old. Where there had been the edges there was now only the gelatinous material that when probed would not rebound." But his eyes were still "open and moist, curiously childlike and vulnerable."

On September 19, at 8:35 P.M. Central Daylight Time, Don Yates in East Lansing placed a long-distance call to Woolrich at the Sheraton-Russell to see how he was getting along. In his memoir he describes that call and its aftermath.

> The operator answered, and I said: "May I speak to Cornell Woolrich, please?"
>
> There was a long pause, too long a pause, and that seemed strange to me.
>
> She said: "Are you a friend to Cornell Woolrich?"
>
> And I said: "Yes, I am. Could I speak with him, please?"
>
> She said: "Well," as if searching for words, "something's happened. Mr. Woolrich has been found unconscious, and he's just a minute ago been taken out in an ambulance to the hospital."
>
> I was, of course, dumbstruck by the fact. So I said: "I'll call you back tomorrow and see what information you can give me."
>
> I called back the next day and she was able to give me the name of the doctor who was treating him. I called the doctor and he said that [Woolrich] had suffered a stroke and was unconscious.
>
> I said: "Well, I'll call you back again and find out how he's doing."
>
> He said: "That'll be all right."
>
> The days passed, and I called, and he remained in a coma. On the 25th of September—that would be six days after he lost consciousness—he died.
>
> It seems strange to me that the last manifestation of our friendship was my call to him at an instant when he was in

> great need but it was too late for me to do anything for him. I missed his last words perhaps by a minute or so.
>
> It's a friendship that I'll always prize, because I think he was an enormously gifted writer. And maybe part of his gift was the fact that he was a haunted man as well. I never remember anyone who acted [so much] in his waking hours as if he were living in some kind of dream. It was always lurking in the background, the fringes of his conversation. There was always somehow an expression in his eyes, sometimes painful but never disappearing.

On September 25, 1968, two and a half months short of his sixty-fifth birthday, the dream ended and the specter of Anahuac came for him, the glass was lifted and the fly released from life, into eternal torment or eternal joy, or perhaps, as he believed at least until his last few months, into nothingness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Woolrich's body was taken to the Frank E. Campbell funeral home, on Madison Avenue and 81st Street. He lay there only for one evening, Friday, September 27, "surrounded," Barry Malzberg said, "by the respectful flowers of the respectful bank which was his executor." Just five people came to say goodbye: a man from Chase Manhattan, MWA executive secretary Gloria Amoury, *EQMM* managing editor Clayton Rawson and two others. "I still feel the chilling effect of that virtually empty room he was in," Amoury wrote many years later.

A somewhat better attended memorial service was held in the funeral parlor at 10:30 the next morning. A priest Woolrich had never known said words over him and then his body was taken to its final destination beside his mother at Ferncliff in the family crypt. "It was hideous the day of the funeral," Malzberg recalled.

The will drafted for him in 1961 by Edwin Singer left almost everything he owned in trust to establish a scholarship fund for students at Columbia University "who are interested in entering upon a career in writing." The fund is named after Woolrich's mother. Woolrich had kept trunkfuls of papers at the local branch of Chase Manhattan, says Singer, who supervised the settling of the estate, but "at his home in the Sheraton-Russell I don't think he had two suits." Among the properties he owned were 11,000 shares of American Telephone & Telegraph stock and 2,500 shares of General Motors, all apparently left to him when Claire died. Singer was never able to find the stock certificates. "We went through the trunks, we advertised, we went all over to find them . . . In the end we had to post a bond and get new certificates." Singer at least half believes that Woolrich had intended to hide the originals, saying to himself: "I'm going to make the greatest mystery of all my life. Let them try and find those certificates."

The trouble with this theory is that so much else seemed to be missing too. Over almost forty-five years of full-time writing, Woolrich must have accumulated thousands of pages of typescript. Where did they go? Of the work published in his lifetime, the only typescripts found were those of the 1931 stage play version of *Cover Charge*, of three novels—*Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1945), *Waltz Into Darkness* (1947) and *Hotel Room* (1958)—and of the two 1958 radio and TV plays and a few late short stories. All these are now preserved in the Rare Book and Manuscript Division of the Columbia University Library. Where's the rest of it? Malzberg remembers that at the end of his life Woolrich "had almost none of his books left in the room [at the Sheraton-Russell]; he had given them all away to casual visitors. Bellboys. Maids. The night manager. An employee of his literary agent. [Obviously this last is Malzberg himself.] He could not bear to have his work around him anymore." Could he have given away most of his manuscripts too, or thrown them away?

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"He died in print," Malzberg said. Under the contract negotiated when Malzberg was Woolrich's agent, Ace Books continued to publish new paperback editions of the *noir* classics, releasing *Rendezvous in Black* and *The Black Path of Fear* in 1968 and *The Black Curtain* and *The Black Angel* (the latter with a eulogy of Woolrich by Mike Avallone) in 1969, but sales were weak and the series was dropped.

Two short stories from his final period were published posthumously in magazines. The earlier of these in point of time is the trifle which Woolrich called by the haunting title "How Beautiful You Are" and sold as an original to the French magazine *Constellation* back in April of 1959. After his death the Scott Meredith agency placed the U.S. rights with no less than *The Saturday Evening Post*, whose editors had never bought a word from Woolrich in his lifetime. After a long publishing hiatus the magazine had recently been resurrected, but its purchase of a Woolrich story did nothing to restore the glory it had enjoyed in Woolrich's prime. "The Talent" (*Saturday Evening Post*, Summer 1971) is a nothing anecdote, less than a thousand words long, about how an ugly man wins a lovely woman's heart thanks to his knack for the creative insult. Not a single detail in the story helps us to date it, and I wouldn't be surprised if it goes back to the late twenties when Woolrich was doing somewhat similar tales for *College Humor* and *Illustrated Love*. It's unlikely to be reprinted and will interest only the most fanatical Woolrich completists.

The other posthumous story must be included in any list, however brief, of *noir* at its best and bleakest. "New York Blues" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, December 1970) had been purchased by Fred Dannay for $350 in May or June of 1967, the last new Woolrich work he bought and the most powerful. Its story line is almost nonexistent and at the same time pure *noir*: A nameless man who has killed the woman he loved, or thinks he killed her, or perhaps killed no one at all, sits in the dark of a room on the second floor of a New York hotel and looks out at the night and waits in terror for the Them who are death personified to take him. Within this minimalist framework Woolrich manages to reprise virtually every motif, belief, device that had pervaded his fiction for generations. This one has everything: the flashes of word magic, the touches of evocative song lyrics ("Here's to the losers, Here's to them all"), love and loneliness, madness and death, partial amnesia, paranoia and total despair. "Each man dies as he was meant to die, and as he was born, and as he lived: alone, all alone. Without any God, without any hope, without any record to show for his life." If this was the last story Woolrich completed, he couldn't have ended his career more fittingly.

• • •

The handful of tales he finished in his last years was only a fraction of what he wrote near the end. Chase Manhattan officers found among his papers the incomplete typescripts of two novels and a novelette, and his safe deposit box at the Chase branch at 30 Rockefeller Plaza contained what he apparently considered the final form of his "collection of personal memoirs": *Blues of a Lifetime.* All these documents have been preserved in Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Division along with the surviving typescripts of his published fiction.

On the title page of *Blues of a Lifetime* Woolrich describes the work as "personal stories" and quotes a line from Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*: "Each of us, alone, unaided, of his own powers, must unravel the riddle . . . before death, or else part in despair." The next page is in Woolrich's own handwriting.

> I have not written this for it to be well-written, nor read by anyone else; I have written it for myself alone. This is the way it was; this is the way it has to be told. It makes me blue to

> look back at the past, but I want to look back once more, before it's gone forever.

But as usual when he writes or talks about himself, we can't believe him. Despite his disclaimer, *Blues of a Lifetime* is very well written; despite his insistence that he's telling of his life "the way it was," it contains at least as much fiction as truth; and despite his assertion that he'd written it for himself alone I suspect he would have offered it for publication in due course if he'd lived longer. Although it can be relied on only with extreme caution, I've quoted it extensively in this book *faute de mieux*. I hope it will be published (with the necessary annotations) sometime soon.

• • •

Of the two novels he didn't live to finish, the one to which he devoted most of what energy and passion were left to him in the sixties was *Into the Night*. Too many of its almost three hundred typed pages are written functionally, eschewing vivid imagery and detail for nonstop pedestrian dialogue, but at its best the manuscript is as hypnotically intense—and as packed with emotional anguish and self-contempt and despair—as the classics he wrote in his prime. Woolrich might have thought he was going back to his origins as a mainstream novelist, but with its guilt-wracked female protagonist who enters the life of the young woman she accidentally killed, and vows to avenge the mangling of the dead woman's life by two other people, and assumes new identities to insinuate herself into the worlds of those she lives to destroy, and falls in love despite herself with the man she feels compelled to kill, *Into the Night* is clearly in a direct line of descent from two of his best-known *romans noirs* of the forties, *The Bride Wore Black* and *The Black Angel*.

The year is 1961, established by perfunctory references to a few events in the headlines. Although the first twenty-three pages are missing from the typescript as we have it, thanks to Woolrich's inability to work out the details satisfactorily, the major event in them is clear from what follows: Madeline Chalmers has accidentally shot to death a girl named Starr Bartlett whom she had never seen before. As the manuscript opens she has gotten into the lonely little room Starr had lived in and is going through her meager possessions while flaying her own conscience.

> It's tough to die when you're young. Like a stray dog.
>
> I must remember, and remember, and remember that, by the hour, she told herself. By the hour and by the day and by the week; yes, even by the year, if it should become necessary. Until I have at least partly undone this terrible thing that I've

> done to her. This thing that, try as I will, can never again be wholly undone. . . .
>
> She put out the light, moved over a chair, and sat down by the window, looking out. It was evening in the city, and evening in the sky. Below there were a thousand stars, above them were just as many. But the ones below were like human lives, just there for a night and then gone. The ones above were like human hopes and dreams, they glowed on there forever. And if one life failed and went out, then another came along and took up the hope, the dream, glowing there immutably above, glowing there forever.
>
> As I am doing now, she thought. As I am doing now.
>
> And peering at them, until they seemed to be reflected in the strained width, the glistening anxiety, of her eyes, she breathed softly, supplicatingly to them: You must have seen her sitting at this same window before me. You must have heard the heartbeats of her hopes and aspirations, clearly in the stillness of the night. Do *you* know what they were? Do *you*?

Less than two pages into the existing typescript, we know that guilt has destroyed Madeline's sanity—and that she's going to dedicate the rest of her life to becoming the woman she killed.

Armed with what she's learned from the contents of Starr's room, she travels to her victim's hometown, rents a room in a drab hotel, strikes up an acquaintanceship with Starr's widowed mother and worms her way into Charlotte Bartlett's confidence. But when Madeline is physically unable to accompany Mrs. Bartlett to a Mass for her daughter, Charlotte intuits that her newfound friend is Starr's murderer. "Why do you want to come in here? I have no more children. . . . Find someone else's house now to bring sorrow into." Two days later the women are together again, co-conspirators in the insane delusion that Madeline can carry on Starr's life. Charlotte shares with Madeline the story of the successive tragedies in the Bartlett family, of how her five-year-old son had been snatched while playing in the front yard and, in a reprise of the classic Woolrich annihilation motif, "[d]isappeared from the face of the earth" a quarter century ago. Over the course of several days Charlotte confides everything she knew about Starr's experiences after leaving home, and even lets Madeline read her daughter's letters. From them Madeline learns that Starr had had a chance encounter with a man named Vick Herrick and had fallen desperately in love with him—"so much that sometimes I'm afraid . . . some unkind fate will punish us for daring to be so happy"—and had married him as soon as his divorce from nightclub singer Adelaide Nelson had become final. It was Adelaide, Mrs. Bartlett tells Madeline, who "did something to them that completely destroyed the marriage. . . . I never knew what. Starr wouldn't say what." Just that one phone call from Adelaide "wrecked my life, ruined my happiness, opened wide the gates of hell and pushed me through." When Starr had come home to say goodbye to her mother for the last time, she had had a gun with her and was planning to use it on both Adelaide and Vick, but Charlotte had sneaked the weapon out of her bag. When Madeline says goodbye to Charlotte, Starr's gun is with her and we know she is going to carry out Starr's plan. "*I promised her. I pledged it to her. You cannot break faith with the dead, or they will arise to accuse you.*" On this psychotic note the first and by far the most powerful part of the novel comes to an end.

The next section of about one hundred typescript pages opens with Madeline locating Adelaide, who is singing at a club in a nameless and featureless city, presumably New York. After following the singer to her apartment door, Madeline buys some music paper, makes up some amateurish songs, barges in on Adelaide at home and pretends to try to interest her in the incompetent compositions. One snatch of Madeline's lyrics will be vaguely familiar to Woolrichians with long memories:

You and I together all alone
In a little country of our own
Where the population's only two. . . .

It's the same song that was played and sung throughout the 1929 mainstream novel *Times Square*! Madeline's ploy works and Adelaide quickly accepts Madeline not only as a genuine aspiring songwriter but as a friend and confidante. Before long they're calling each other Dell and Mad (an unsubtle but definite sign of Woolrich's recognition that his protagonist is insane), and Madeline has been given a spare key to Adelaide's apartment. Amid long tedious stretches of girl talk, Madeline discovers that Adelaide is a classic gold-digger, skillfully juggling two violently jealous lovers—her underworld-connected manager Jack d'Angelo and stockbroker Walter Shiller—who don't know of each other's existence.

Finally one day Adelaide opens up to Madeline about her former husband Vick Herrick, and tells how after two years of marriage Vick fell in love with a younger woman. At first, Adelaide says, she tried to win Vick back by making him jealous, faking evidence to suggest she'd been entertaining a lover of her own. The ploy and many precise details of its execution, like having the elevator operator smoke the phantom lover's cigars, come straight out of Woolrich's 1936 *Breezy Stories* romance "His Name Was Jack." As in that long-forgotten tale, the plan doesn't work: Vick is too much in love to care about any new man in Adelaide's life. Indeed he tells her soon afterward that he feels nothing for her anymore, and the next morning he moves out. Determined to get even with the young woman who broke up her marriage, Adelaide hires a sleazy private eye to backtrack the interloper's past and find something that will destroy her relationship with Vick. Three months later the detective comes back with a bombshell. "It blew them so far apart," Adelaide tells Madeline, "they could never get back together again, not in this lifetime." But she refuses to tell her newfound friend what the bombshell was.

By this time Madeline has decided that the way to get even with Adelaide on Starr's behalf is to write some poison-pen letters to the stockbroker Shiller, anonymously tipping him off about Adelaide's affair with d'Angelo and trusting male violence to take its course. One evening soon after mailing the crucial letter, Madeline receives a frantic phone call from Adelaide, begging her to come over and help protect her from one of her lovers. Certain that her plan is working, Madeline promises to come but stalls as long as possible. By the time she uses her key to enter Adelaide's apartment the singer is dead in her bathtub, with evidence proving that someone had held her head under water till she'd drowned. Madeline slips away and is assailed by fresh guilt for what she's done.

A few hours later her doorbell rings and she's facing two suspicious plainclothesmen in a long-drawn-out but tensionless questioning session. The senior man investigating Adelaide's murder is John F.X. Smith, known to his pals as Smitts, a husky fellow with a tiger's persistence, and one reason his scenes with Madeline don't work well is that he's a cipher, not the Noir Cop with a sadistic streak that he must be if his harassment of Madeline is to generate suspense. After endless boring dialogue, Smitts reveals to her that Adelaide's murderer has signed a full confession—and that it's not Shiller but d'Angelo. With the case closed, Smitts loses all interest in whatever lay behind Madeline's invasion of the dead singer's world. As the episode ends, Madeline discovers that her poison-pen letter never reached Shiller because the stamp had come unglued from the envelope in transit! Score one more blow for Woolrich Coincidence. Relieved of her latest burden of guilt over someone's death, Madeline closes down her songwriter identity and sets out after her second target.

After starting a new life in another New York residence hotel, Madeline volunteers to go door-to-door soliciting contributions to a multiple sclerosis fund as cover for checking out the several V. Herricks in the phone book. This leads her into confrontations with a number of Herricks she doesn't want, including a sexually mutilated war veteran with a compulsion to beat women as a substitute for intercourse. As usual, Woolrich invests the psychopath with so much empathy that we are forced into another divided reaction. No sooner has Madeline vainly gone through all the V. Herricks in the directory than Woolrich Coincidence tosses the right man's address into her lap. Vick is a professional photographer, so Madeline visits his studio to have her picture taken but manipulates the situation so that he's all but forced to ask her out. Time shapes their relationship so that Vick believes he's in love again and Madeline finds herself falling uncontrollably in love with him just as the original Starr Bartlett once had.

Finally comes the day when, invited to Vick's apartment for dinner, Madeline resolves to kill him that night. Tension mounts as she devotes the day to a series of rituals—showering, having her hair done, buying a black dress—as if she were preparing herself for a religious ceremony. Their dinner is the only meal Woolrich ever described in any detail: dry sherry, club steaks with mushroom and sauterne sauce, roquefort cheese on crackers, black coffee laced with cognac. The phonograph records Madeline selects to accompany the dinner include the aria "Un bel di" from *Madame Butterfly.* As the last supper ends and Madeline edges closer to her handbag containing what had been Starr's pistol, Vick suddenly begins talking about how his marriage to Starr had broken up. After the mysterious phone call which we know was from Adelaide Nelson, Starr "fell down on the carpet right there. . . . Fell like a stone. . . . She kept threshing around on the floor, as if she were having a convulsion. Saliva kept flowing out of her mouth, in spurts. It shone silvery, in little foamy patches. . . . She pulled little tufts out of [the carpet] with her teeth." In the hospital she had refused to see Vick, and when she was discharged she had vanished without leaving a forwarding address but only an envelope for Vick, containing his wedding ring in a smear of her own excrement. He had never seen her again. On the brink of shooting him Madeline describes for Vick how Starr had died in her arms, the random victim of another Falling Beam. Vick hurls his brandy glass across the room.

> The liquor made an amber rainbow of falling drops . . . and the glass exploded into a hundred pieces against the wall.
>
> "Thanks, Life!" he roared at the top of his voice. "Thanks a load! Thanks a lump!"
>
> And then he balled a fist, and bared his teeth like an animal snarling at a master who has just kicked him, and looked straight up overhead at the ceiling. But she knew he wasn't seeing the ceiling.
>
> "And as for you—!"

It's one of the last defiances of God the malign thug that Woolrich lived to write. At the climax of the scene Vick screams out exactly what Starr had been told in the nightmare phone call that had ruine her life. The secret, if you haven't already guessed, is that Vick is th long ago vanished son of Charlotte Bartlett, that he and Starr are nc only husband and wife but brother and sister—and that he had know this when he married her. After several pages of some of the mos intensely psychotic dialogue in *noir* literature, Madeline decides tha Vick does not deserve "[t]he gift of clean, fast death, and then no mor horror, no more fear, no more anything but nothing"; that he shoul be forced to live and continue suffering the tortures of the damned

> She ran and ran and ran, through endless corridors of the night . . . ran for miles and ran for hours . . . until at last the running stopped and she lay still, holding a palmful of little white pellets in one hand, a small half-empty bottle in the other.

About two hundred words later the typescript as we have it is cut off so that we never find out what happened to Madeline and Vick and th rest of the lost warped souls of *Into the Night.*

There is, however, one clue to how the novel *should* have ended. Th existing typescript includes two pages with which at one tim Woolrich wanted the book to conclude. All but a few words ar blocked out but the entire fragment is readable underneath th deletion marks and clearly describes a last meeting between Madelin and Vick. *He keeps calling her Starr.* The implication seems to be that his near-fatal confrontation with Madeline has pushed him over the edge, that he thinks she's the original Starr, returned from the dead; and that Madeline completes her atonement for Starr's death by accepting the role, making her victim come back to life and to Vick's arms, incest and all. That is the kind of twisted and perverse climax which I believe the book calls for and which Woolrich, if he'd lived to work out all the problem spots, might and should have opted for. Or am I reading too much into what might just have been a few typos?

Barry Malzberg's correspondence with me reconstructs the history of the manuscript more closely than can be determined with regard to any other Woolrich novel. It was written in the early sixties under contract to Simon & Schuster but then rejected by the firm's mystery editor, Clayton Rawson, "who, according to Cornell, hated it. It was then offered around to most hardcover houses with no takers." Malzberg first read the manuscript in 1967 when Scott Meredith assigned him to be Woolrich's agent. As it then stood, "the awful confrontation at the end was only sketched in and then evaded because, for whatever reason, Cornell didn't want to do it. . . ." Malzberg sent the manuscript out to a number of editors including Lee Wright, then at Random House, who had launched Woolrich's career as a crime novelist by purchasing *The Bride Wore Black* back in 1940. She phoned Malzberg two days later. "Dear," she said, "you're obviously very devoted to Cornell and he needs a friend and it's nice of you, but you're also very obviously unaware of the situation here. . . . Cornell has gone a long, long way downhill since the fifties. Every one of us have seen that awful novel, years and years ago, and no one will ever publish it." Malzberg eventually gave the manuscript back to Woolrich "with a detailed set of notes on revisions which, I thought, would have brought this book to the level of his best work. Or beyond. He said that he would try it; he would do the book 'for me' and this, if nothing else, would keep him alive." It didn't. Malzberg tells me that he was the one who suggested the title *Into the Night*.

How good would the book have been if Woolrich had lived to complete it? With a springboard situation more powerful than in any of his novels since 1950's *Fright*, with the maniacal intensity of several of its main characters and of the best of its narrative and dialogue, it might have developed into a *noir* classic. If Woolrich had managed to enliven the dull stretches and solve the denouement problems, any competent editor could have cut the incidental gaffes—such as Charlotte's statement that she gave birth to Starr nine months after learning she was pregnant!—and the groaners with which the existing typescript abounds:

> Before the window there was a brilliantly bright stepladder . . . a phantom stepladder of fuming sun motes, placed there as though for some angel in domestic service to step up on and hang the curtains.
>
> [Liquor] was only good for physical shock . . . but not for mental and metaphysical distresses.
>
> She wants me to know she's been married more than once, Madeline thought cognizantly.

A work full of problems but also of great potential crying out for realization, that is the dominant impression one takes away from *Into the Night* as Woolrich left it.

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His other novel-in-progess was months if not years from completion when he died, but it too might have developed with time and care into a first-rate *roman noir* that only Woolrich could have written. He seems to have begun work on the book in 1966, judging by a casual reference to that year in the course of the completed segments, and his first title for the novel was *Tonight, Somewhere in New York*, which he eventually x'ed out and replaced with a perfect Woolrich title, *The*

Loser. Clearly he never got far with this project, for not only do several sequences exist in more than one draft but a number of characters and situations overlap with people and events from *Into the Night*, as if he couldn't make up his mind what belonged in the one book and what should go into the other. What he did complete, however, shows us the direction in which *The Loser* was headed, and hints that it might have grown into a fascinating novel.

In the only finished draft of the first chapter, which runs seventeen typed pages, we pick up the nameless protagonist-narrator just after he's killed the woman he once loved. The opening monologue is as psychotically gripping as any passage in late Woolrich.

> Have you ever seen a woman die? I hope you never have to, never do. I mean in violence, at your own hands. It isn't a good thing to see. When you see a man die, you see only yourself; not someone apart whom you once knelt to in your heart and offered up your love to. . . .
>
> She falls from higher than a man, from over the heads of men, whether they're lovers or husbands or brothers. And whether she was good or she was evil, whatever evil is, she falls with a flash and a fiery trace, like a disintegrating star plunging into the water. . . .
>
> That face you see before you that has just finished dying, will come back palely haunting into every night's sleep for the rest of your life, no matter how much she deserved it, no matter how tough your mind. You know it will, you know. That scene you saw before you that has just ended, will come back meshed into every dream you ever dream again, so that you don't just kill her once, you kill her a thousand and one times, and she never stays quite dead. And all the brandy and all the barbiturates can't make it go away.
>
> Those lips that pressed against yours like warm velvet and clung there in soft adhesion, look at them now, twisted into an ellipse, a crevice for a surprise that never finishes coming out. Those eyes that glittered with love and hate and laughter and hate and doubt and hate, and hate and hate and hate, they don't hate now any more. . . .
>
> The body that once was the goal, and the striving, and the will-o'-the-wisp of the act of love. . . .
>
> All of this now devastated, distorted, and in death.

After slipping away from the murder scene, the narrator stops in at a bar for a drink, gets into a stupid argument that leads to a fistfight and inadvertently winds up locked in a cell on a drunk and disorderly charge but also gifted by dumb chance with a perfect alibi. This chapter, under the title "Life Is Weird Sometimes," is included in the first posthumous Woolrich story collection, *Nightwebs* (1971). A variant version of part of the same chapter, covering nine typed pages, is much less well developed and dramatic.

In the next completed chapter, which runs from pages eighteen through thirty-five and is headed "Back to the Beginning," there's a flashback to the first meeting of protagonist-narrator Cleve Evans with a young woman named Janet Bartlett, whom he nearly runs over in his sports car one lonely night. He drives her to the hospital, sends her flowers by way of apology, and soon the two are in love. "You're my destiny," Janet tells him. "I've been coming straight toward you ever since I was born. You, and this room, and this night." As the chapter ends she's about to tell him some incident out of her past, but we'll never know what it was. A gap in the typescript is followed by an untitled chapter taking up the pages numbered thirty-eight through fifty-six, where we learn that Cleve already has a wife, a bitchy nightclub singer named Adelaide. The action here is all too reminiscent of the sequence in *Into the Night* where Vick Herrick left the Adelaide of that novel. Cleve returns to the marital apartment, packs his suitcase, tells his wife he's in love with another woman, endures her furious tirade as she refuses to give him up, and leaves her swearing revenge on both him and his new woman. Cleve and Janet motor to Mexico, where he is divorced and instantly remarries, and come back to Manhattan to start life together. One night when they go dancing, the three-piece combo plays a song whose lyrics we have heard in Woolrich once or twice before: "You and I together all alone. . . ." The chapter trails off unfinished but the last paragraph hints that their delirious happiness is about to be menaced. Next comes a five-page fragment entitled "The Death of Love, The Love of Death," which is narrated in third person and also echoes *Into the Night* as a time is described when Adelaide was in love with her tough-guy manager d'Angelo. It's not at all clear how Woolrich intended to fit this material into the structure.

The following twenty-one unnumbered pages take us back to Cleve's first-person narration. The police come to the apartment he and Janet are sharing and arrest not him but her for Adelaide's murder. Cleve fights the detectives like a madman, screams that he himself murdered his ex-wife, but is not believed and winds up in the psychiatric ward at Bellevue. This intensely written chapter was sold by Barry Malzberg to the men's magazine *Escapade*, where it appeared as a self-standing short story ("Warrant of Arrest," *Escapade*, April 1968) a few months before Woolrich's death.

What was meant to happen next is anyone's guess. Clearly Janet was to have been convicted of murder, which probably would have required a Stupid Trial sequence. Then Cleve was to have left New

York in search of evidence on which his lawyer Stewart Sutphen (modeled on Edwin Singer?) might have gotten the conviction reversed. Perhaps, like the female narrator of "Murder in Wax," the 1935 short story later expanded into *The Black Angel*, Cleve would have hunted for someone to frame for the murder he himself committed, and if so the most likely candidate for the frame would have been d'Angelo. Woolrich never filled in this part of the novel.

There are two versions of the final chapter, one running fourteen typed pages, the other thirteen. In the former, Cleve returns to New York with evidence of some sort that will clear Janet but only to learn from the lawyer Sutphen that he's too late: Janet committed suicide in her cell that very morning. Cleve's wild unbearable grief is evoked with all the power of Woolrich at his best. "I just want your voice in my ear. Just want to hear your voice in my ear. Just say my name, just say Cleve, like you used to say Cleve. Just say it once, that'll be my forever, that'll be my all-time, my eternity. I don't want God. This isn't a triangle. There's no room for outsiders in my love for you. Just say it one time more. If you can't say it whole, then say it broken. If you can't say it full, then say it whispered. Cleve." He returns to the apartment he shared with Janet and dances with her dress in his arms to the strains of "You and I together all alone" and jumps out the window, echoing James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and *Double Indemnity* which had likewise ended with the first-person narrator's death. In the other draft of this final chapter Woolrich rearranged some of the plot so as to make an independent short story, in which it's Cleve himself who's been imprisoned for Adelaide's murder. He is pardoned, returns to New York and finds that Janet, unaware of his homecoming, has killed herself that morning. A more polished version of this draft was printed in the Mystery Writers of America anthology *With Malice Toward All* (1968), edited by Woolrich fan Robert L. Fish, who not only made the chapter read more smoothly but even paid Woolrich's MWA dues a few months before his death so that that wretched but brilliant recluse would qualify for inclusion in the volume. Woolrich didn't live to see it published.

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In his last years Woolrich was also toying with a new collection of short stories, most of them without crime or suspense. His title for the projected book was *I Was Waiting for You: Tales of Love and Despair.* The cover page includes a motto from Edna St. Vincent Millay—"But pass in silence the mute grave of two/Who lived and died believing love was true"—and the anticipated contents of the volume: "I Was Waiting for You," "New York Blues," "*Now* I've Got You," "Two Lives," "Old Husband, Young Wife" and "Don't Let Men Hurt Her, Jimmy." Only the second and third of these were completed and both, as we've seen, were published in *EQMM*, with "*Now* I've Got You" retitled by Fred Dannay "For the Rest of Her Life." The fifth and sixth titles never became stories and all that exists of the fourth, "Two Lives," is a two-and-a-half-page fragment about the kidnapping of baby Christopher Kemp on the day before Pearl Harbor. Since a similar fate befell Starr Bartlett's older brother in *Into the Night*, I suspect that Woolrich planned either to convert material from that novel into a short story or to incorporate material from that story into the novel.

The surviving fifty-plus typed pages of the novelette "I Was Waiting for You" must represent only a fraction of what Woolrich hoped to write since they end without the two main characters having met. Most of the existing scenes take place during World War I and the twenties and are crammed with awkward sentences and ponderous asides to the reader about the fads, fashions and fancies of the period. One needs no more than the initials of their names to know that the protagonists, Bruce Eadlin and Eva Brundage, are meant for each other, but in the Woolrich world this is no guarantee. At one point in the typescript these characters almost get to know one another, and I can't help wondering if that was the point. A man and woman who are just right for each other but never quite manage to meet and remain miserable and apart throughout their lives—what an idea for the ultimate Woolrich love story!

In the 1937 desk diary where he kept his financial data, Woolrich liked to jot down quotations he'd encountered that appealed to him, perhaps as epigraphs for future books. The lines he copied come from a wide range of authors including Victor Hugo, Robert Browning, Joseph Conrad, Aldous Huxley and Edna St. Vincent Millay and usually deal with the eternal Woolrich themes of love, loneliness and death. From Frederick Prokosch:

I call out your name; but of course there is no answer.
It was only that, being lonely, there was something I longed to say.

What Woolrich called his "personal motto" is from a character in Ben Hecht's story "Specter of the Rose": "I am unfit for living. I have learned this. I am fit only for art." Another quotation, from Huxley's *Ape and Essence*, superbly distills Woolrich's view of man in the *noir* universe:

> And in an instant his quiet terror is transmuted into a frenzy as violent as it is futile. There is no longer a man among his fellow men, no longer a rational being speaking articulately

> to other rational beings; there is only a lacerated animal, screaming and struggling in the trap.

The next quotation in the diary is from Woolrich himself: "Death comes to all of us, and yet to each of us it is something different, something on which we cannot compare experiences with a single fellow human being." And just beneath these lines comes an epigram that is unattributed but certainly reflects Woolrich's thinking: "Who kills one man kills the whole world."

The diary also contains a list of possible titles for stories Woolrich never wrote. Most of these are dreadful puns which we can be thankful he never had a chance to use, such as:

A Room with a Clue
Al Barber and the 40 Thieves
Alice from Dallas
Dead Earnest
Free, Tight and Twenty-One
Hearse Power
Sentimental Oriental Gentleman
Slaughter in Oporto
Scot Free
Sure As Shooting

A few, like "My Friend the Enemy" and "Brave in the Morning, Scared to Death at Night" and "They Died Like Flies in Valparaiso," sound a bit more promising. But only one of the listed titles truly catches the dark spirit at the heart of the Woolrich world, and that one is so perfect that I've taken steps to make sure it's not forgotten.

First You Dream, Then You Die.

• • •

Woolrich died but his work didn't and still hasn't. Three years after his death, Harper & Row published *Nightwebs* (1971), the most generous of all the Woolrich story collections, containing more than 500 pages of his short fiction never previously in book form. Except for a trade paperback edition of this volume (Avon pb #19521, 1974) there was a lull in Woolrich publications till the end of the decade, followed by the beginning of a burst of activity that continues unabated today. Mysterious Press broke the ice with *Angels of Darkness* (1978), a collection of nine Woolrich tales about women protagonists, with an introduction by Harlan Ellison. In 1979 and 1980 the hardcover reprint house of Gregg Press offered handsome new editions of Woolrich's *Rendezvous in Black* and the fiendishly hard to find *Manhattan Love Song*. Next Southern Illinois University Press released *The Fantastic Stories of Cornell Woolrich* (1981), which brought together eight of his tales of fantasy and horror, mainly from thirties pulps. Between 1982 and 1984 Ballantine Books launched a full-scale Woolrich revival with a matched set of softcovers—eleven of the major suspense novels plus a new collection, *Rear Window and Four Short Novels* (Ballantine pb #30668, 1984)—each one graced with a cover illustration in the *film noir* style by Larry Schwinger. On the heels of that series came three more collections: Southern Illinois University Press' *Darkness at Dawn* (1985), containing Woolrich's first thirteen crime stories, and the Carroll & Graf paperbacks *Vampire's Honeymoon* (1985) and *Blind Date with Death* (1985), which resurrected a number of thirties and forties tales representing Woolrich at his pulpiest if not always his best.

As of this writing the latest Woolrich book and in many respects the most exciting since his death is the Mysterious Press edition of *Into the Night* (1987), completed by mystery writer Lawrence Block (b.1938). As we've seen, the first twenty-three pages were missing from the typescript Woolrich left, and Block's version of how Madeline Chalmers accidentally killed Starr Bartlett is so poignantly visualized and written and so true to the *noir* world of falling beams that without my copy of the typescript I could never have told where Block left off and the authentic Woolrich began. I am less enthusiastic about Block's ending, which he felt he had to make extremely upbeat because that was the nature of the two pages of crossed-out material with which the typescript closes, but which strikes me as infinitely too neat and schmaltzy to be compatible with the body of the book. With all the typescript's gaffes and groaners intact, this powerful if flawed novel is at least finally available to readers.

Meanwhile the Woolrich revival proceeds on other fronts too. His stories and novelettes are still reprinted regularly in anthologies, movie and TV option money continues to enrich the Columbia University scholarship fund in his mother's name, translations of his work are marketed across Europe, a forty-five-minute documentary on his world ("Nacht Ohne Morgen" or "Night Without Morning," directed by Christian Bauer) has been seen on public television in Germany and Italy, and an astonishing number of graduate students on the Continent are busily preparing dissertations on that haunted man and his nightworld. There is at least an even chance that his autobiographical manuscript *Blues of a Lifetime* will be published within a year or two.

Woolrich's work lives but death has claimed most of the writers and editors who promoted and supported his career. Anthony Boucher died of lung cancer just a few months before Woolrich himself, at the unbearably early age of fifty-six. Hans Santesson in 1976, Steve Fisher in 1980, Bob Fish in 1981, Fred Dannay in 1982, Lee Wright in 1986—

the lights go out, the lives go out, the memories fade to black. The younger writers like Ron Goulart and Harlan Ellison who knew Woolrich in his sad last years are in their fifties now, and flourishing.

And what of that intense young man with literary-quarterly ambitions who was assigned by Scott Meredith to be Woolrich's agent in the last two years of his life? Soon after the death of the man whose world had begun to possess him, Barry Malzberg came into his own as a writer, prolifically selling fiction in which the spirit of the Poe of our century survives. Malzberg's style and substance aren't at all like those of Woolrich. He tends to write plotless, characterless interior monologues in the stream-of-consciousness tradition. But the minds into which he plunges us invariably belong to the crazed, a legion of psychopaths in whose flesh he makes us live—very much as Woolrich did. Most of Malzberg's vast body of work is a unique sort of *noir* science fiction but one finds the same dark forces and obsessional language and warped minds in his crime and suspense fiction, such as *The Running of Beasts* (1976), coauthored by Malzberg and Bill Pronzini, perhaps the finest novel of pure terror since Woolrich's death. One might almost believe he sees it as his mission to keep Woolrich alive. I am not surprised that his daughter, who was born in 1970, is named Erika Cornell.

Woolrich never thought much of his work and his claims for himself were more modest than the claims for him that I and many others have made since his death. "I wasn't that good, you know," he told Malzberg. "What I was was a guy who could write a little, publishing in magazines surrounded by people who couldn't write at all. So I looked pretty good. But I never thought I was that good at all. All that I thought was that I tried to tell the truth."

At the end he still hoped that his work might save him. "I was only trying to cheat death," he wrote in a handwritten fragment found among his papers. "I was only trying to surmount for a little while the darkness that all my life I surely knew was going to come rolling in on me some day and obliterate me. I was only trying to stay alive a little brief while longer, after I was already gone. To stay in the light, to be with the living a little while past my time." The power of his dark vision could not withstand the specter of Anahuac. But as long as there are people to be haunted by the fruit of his life, by the way he took his wretchedness and sense of entrapment and solitude and transformed them into poetry of the shadows, the world Woolrich imagines lives.

And so perhaps does he.

PART FOUR

REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Woolrich's youthful introduction to the movies, his experiences while working at First National Pictures during the silents-to-talkies transition, the two movies based (one of them in name only) on his pre-crime novels and the third picture which he claimed was lifted from a book he'd junked and the general impact of Hollywood on his work and life have been covered elsewhere in this account. The present chapter deals with the theatrical films adapted from his crime stories and novels, with each movie being considered both in its own right and as an adaptation from a Woolrich source.

As we've seen, his first movie sale after launching his career as a suspense writer took place shortly after his story "Face Work" had appeared in the October 1937 *Black Mask*. Columbia Pictures paid him $448.75 for the privilege of turning that tale into *Convicted* (Columbia, 1938), a fifty-four-minute B picture of the sort that all the studios were grinding out like link sausages in the thirties. Quickie director Leon Barsha shot the film on indoor sets in Vancouver, British Columbia, so that it would count toward the quota of movies that English law required each studio to make in Great Britain or its dominions as a prerequisite for British release of its U.S.-made features. The screenplay by Canadian actor-writer Edgar Edwards no only kept with scrupulous fidelity to the Woolrich story but even incorporated without alteration countless lines of his dialogue (mainly the tinny wisecracks with which his pulp characters habitually insult each other). Rita Hayworth starred as Jerry Wheeler, the nightclub dancer desperately trying to prove that her younger brother Chick didn't kill the gold-digging Ruby Rose for whose murder he's been sentenced to die. Charles Quigley, a handsome B-picture leading man of the time, played Burns, the plainclothes detective whom Jerry converts to her cause, and evil-faced Marc Lawrence was cast as Militis, the sinister nightclub proprietor obsessed by Jerry's beauty All the other actors were Canadian, including screenwriter Edgar Edwards, who wangled himself the part of Hayworth's kid brother. It was a cheap-looking throwaway picture that attracted no attention in 1938 and doesn't play much better today even in the light of Hayworth's later rise to superstar. But thanks to the fact that Barsha and Edwards made only minimal changes in the Woolrich story—such as building up the role of Chick's faithful girlfriend Mary Allen and adding a couple of Spanish dance numbers for Hayworth while quietly dropping Militis' custom of branding his women on the hip with a fireplace poker—the film's look and feel capture better than most movies the essence of late-1930s pulp crime fiction. In no way could the picture count as *film noir*.

Woolrich made no more movie sales until after the publication in 1941 of his second suspense novel, *The Black Curtain*, which attracted studio interest with its powerful *noir* story of Frank Townsend's recovery from amnesia and obsession with finding out who and what he was during three and a half lost years. No Hollywood film had yet been made on the subject of loss of memory (although such pictures would glut the market later in the forties), and the best offer for movie rights came from Paramount, the same studio which according to Woolrich's autobiography had released an unauthorized screen version of his *I Love You, Paris* in 1934. His financial records indicate that he was paid $2,225 for permission to make a film from *The Black Curtain*. During production the picture's working title was the same as that of the source novel but it was released as *Street of Chance* (Paramount, 1942), starring Burgess Meredith as Frank Thompson (the reason for the change in the character's name being as murky as the reason for changing the title) and Claire Trevor as Ruth, the woman who loved him in his interim identity. The cast included Louise Platt as Meredith's wife, Sheldon Leonard as the sadistic homicide detective who's out to nail him, Frieda Inescort and Jerome Cowan as the widow and brother of the man Meredith is accused of murdering, and Adeline de Walt Reynolds as the mute and paralyzed old woman who holds the key to the nightmare.

The moderate-budgeted seventy-four-minute film was directed by Jack Hively (b.1910), a young man who had recently come to Paramount from the B-picture unit at RKO, where he'd directed several of George Sanders's cinematic exploits as The Saint. Its photographer was Theodor Sparkuhl, who had worked on most of Ernst Lubitsch's silent films in Germany before coming to Hollywood. Hively and screenplay writer Garrett Fort more or less followed the Woolrich story line for the extremely suspenseful first half of the picture. However, once Meredith and Trevor return to the mansion where the murder was committed, the movie diverges radically from the novel, scrapping the many weak elements in Woolrich's final chapters and all too often substituting clichés from the low-budget detective movies in which Hively had his roots. But the most crucial changes Hively and Fort made were vast improvements on Woolrich. What had been a throwaway element of the novel—Townsend's devising a way of communicating with the paralyzed mute witness and thereby laboriously learning the truth—was transformed by the director and screenwriter into some intensely dramatic on-camera scenes between Meredith and Adeline de Walt Reynolds. Even more important, Hively and Fort scrapped Woolrich's ending in which the murderer turns out to be a peripheral character and worked out a much more effective climax with Claire Trevor herself being exposed as the culprit and then being shot accidentally while struggling with Meredith over a gun. These inspired innovations seem to account for the view of several knowledgeable Woolrichphiles that the movie is better than the novel. In any event, *film noir* specialist Robert Porfirio is right when he remarks that with its hapless and desperate amnesia victim and its sense of doom and foreboding, *Street of Chance* "authentically captures the essence of Woolrich's universe."

But Porfirio's point relates to the themes in *Street of Chance* and only minimally to its visual style. The next Woolrich work to be adapted for the screen was assigned to a producer and a director whose genius for poetic terror rivaled Woolrich's own. In his third suspense novel, *Black Alibi* (1942), Woolrich had set aside loneliness and despair, concentrated on what he called "the line of suspense," and turned out a masterpiece with menace breathing on every page. The five long sequences in which a different young woman is stalked through the night by a killer jaguar, or her own fears, or a madman hiding behind the animal's claws, are among the most terrifying he ever wrote. RKO Radio Pictures bought screen rights to the novel for $5,175 and assigned the project to the production unit of the now legendary Val Lewton (1904–1951), who in the early forties was responsible for some of the most haunting low-key horror films ever made. Lewton, born Vladimir Leventon, was almost exactly Woolrich's age and had spent two years as a journalism student at Columbia University around the time Woolrich had been an undergrad on the same campus, and it's possible, especially in view of both young men's creative interests and Russian ancestry, that in the early 1920s they had known each other. *The Leopard Man* (RKO, 1943) was produced by Lewton and superbly directed by Jacques Tourneur (1904–1977), another visual poet well suited to translate Woolrich onto film. The sixty-six-minute picture was shot between February 8 and March 9, 1943, on a budget of less than $150,000. Dennis O'Keefe starred as press agent Jerry Manning, with Spanish-born Margo as the castanet dancer Clo-Clo (a sanitized version of the near-prostitute in Woolrich's novel) and Jean Brooks as the actress Kiki who becomes the bait for the climactic trap. Featured roles went to Isabel Jewell, James Bell, Margaret Landry, Abner Biberman and Richard Martin. Although meticulously reshaped by Lewton and Tourneur, *The Leopard Man*'s screenplay was credited to Ardel Wray, a young woman who had recently joined Lewton's unit as a writer. The picture followed Woolrich's story line—except for a few matters like moving the setting from Latin America to New Mexico, substituting a black leopard for the novel's jaguar and involving the Clo-Clo character at least peripherally in each episode so as to create a semblance of unity—but adds to the cast a number of people not in the novel, turns one of them into the murderer, and scraps Woolrich's horrific subterranean climax in favor of a chase through a procession of black-robed hooded monks.

The most complete account of *The Leopard Man* is in Joel E. Siegel's critical study *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror* (1973). The film, Siegel points out,

> was a departure from the Lewton formula in several important respects. . . . It was Lewton's first try at a straightforward murder story, and for the first time he included several sequences of explicit bloodshed. In an episode which haunts the memory, a little Mexican girl returning from the store where her mother has sent her to buy food is clawed to death while trying to get someone to open the door. Although the violence is mainly suggested after the child's shuddery walk home, the attack itself is shot from *inside* the house so that we can only hear what is happening—the fact of the child's death is revealed by a rivulet of blood trickling under the door.

If Siegel read *Black Alibi* at all he must have been asleep at the time, for he describes it as "conventional," "heavy in explicit bloodshed," "lacking the kind of poetic suspense [Lewton and Tourneur] favored," a book which "hardly merits the highly sophisticated Lewton narrative technique." As we'll soon see, Siegel isn't the only film critic who feels compelled to snipe at the literary sources of work by first-rate moviemakers, as if what a Lewton or a Hitchcock or a Truffaut adapted for the screen must have been trash before they transformed it. The story which novel and film share, Siegel tells us, "is essentially a thin, nasty-minded story" in which the murders of several innocent women who die "like trapped animals" are "depicted with an obsessive, rather unsavoury relish . . . little more than an exercise in sadistic voyeurism." In one sense Siegel is a victim of the exaggerated feminist sensibility of the 1970s, and in another he's more right than he could have known at the time: the recent wave of Mad Slasher horror films which dwell graphically on women being hacked apart can be traced back, as far as story line is concerned, to *Black Alibi* and *The Leopard Man* (and more immediately of course to Hitchcock's *Psycho*). But the end of his discussion of the picture is a model of balance. "I saw *The Leopard Man* when I was eleven," he says, "and seeing it again for this book, almost twenty years later, I discovered that almost every shot was fixed in my memory. The death of the frightened child, the young girl alone in the cemetery, those shots of the dancer clicking her castanets through the dark streets—these are artful images of fear that will long haunt those who experience them." And so many of those images come either literally or in spirit from Woolrich's novel.

The next film based on his work marked the point at which studios stopped thinking of Woolrich just in terms of medium-budget thrillers and began recognizing the potential of his fiction for top-of-the-line A pictures. What made the breakthrough for him was *Phantom Lady*, the classic *noir* novel of 1942 which inaugurated his William Irish pseudonym. A man quarrels with his wife, goes out and picks up a woman in a bar, spends the evening with her, and comes home to find his wife dead and himself accused of her murder. His only hope of clearing himself is to find the woman who was with him when his wife was killed, but she has vanished into thin air and everyone in a position to know—the nameless bartender at Anselmo's, the jazz drummer, the peppery Latin entertainer—swears that no such woman ever existed. The man is convicted and sentenced to die, and his secretary who has long loved him joins with his best friend in a race against the clock to find the phantom lady and the reason why so many witnesses couldn't see her. It was the perfect story line for a suspense movie.

Universal Pictures bought screen rights to the novel and gave the project to associate producer Joan Harrison, who was just starting out on her own after several years with Alfred Hitchcock, and to German émigré director Robert Siodmak (1900–1973), who had been stuck in absurd pictures like *Son of Dracula* and *Cobra Woman* since his flight from Hitler to the United States. The eighty-seven-minute *Phantom Lady* (Universal, 1944), completed late in October 1943 and released the following February, was directed by Siodmak from a screenplay by Bernard C. Schoenfeld. Franchot Tone starred as Jack Marlow, the counterpart of the novel's Jack Lombard, Ella Raines as Carol Richman, and Thomas Gomez as police detective Burgess. The cast included Alan Curtis as the convicted Scott Henderson, Elisha Cook, Jr., as jazz drummer Cliff March, Andrew Tombes as the night bartender, and Regis Toomey and Joseph Crehan as menacing cops.

The plot of the movie follows Woolrich for about half its length, then veers off on its own paths and becomes silly. Siodmak and Schoenfeld gave away the denouement far too early and turned the novel's murderer into a stereotyped Mad Artist, complete with delusions of grandeur and symbolic migraine headaches and overdone hand gestures. But in terms of visual style much of the film is in harmony with the bleak Woolrich spirit. *Noir* critic Bob Porfirio rightly credits Siodmak and cinematographer Woody Bredell (who it was said could light up a football field with a single match) with capturing on film "the essential ingredients of Woolrich's world, from the desperate innocent loose at night in New York City, a city of hot sweltering streets, to the details of threatening shadows, jazz emanating from low-class bars, and the click of high heels on the pavement. The whole *noir* world is developed here almost entirely through *mise-en-scène*." The picture's best-known sequences—the cat-and-mouse between Raines and Tombes on the Third Avenue Elevated platform and the jam session where orgiastic shots of Cook's drum solo are intercut with Raines's "wordless sexual innuendoes"—are based quite faithfully on scenes in the novel. In his essay "Three Faces of Film Noir," critic Tom Milne praises Siodmak for "creating a somber world of wet streets, dingy offices, low-ceilinged bars, crowded lunch counters, and deserted railway platforms, all unified by an atmosphere of heightened realism in which the expressive quality of the image is due entirely to lighting and composition."

Although Jacques Tourneur's *The Leopard Man* also deserves credit, it was Siodmak in *Phantom Lady* who, more than any previous director of a Woolrich-based film, found a visual correlative for Woolrich's haunting style. The picture was a breakthrough not only for Woolrich but for Siodmak too, and he spent the rest of the decade directing classic *films noirs* like *Christmas Holiday* (1944), *The Suspect* (1944), *Uncle Harry* (1945), *The Spiral Staircase* (1946), *The Killers* (1946), *The Dark Mirror* (1946), *Cry of the City* (1948), *Criss Cross* (1949), and *The File on Thelma Jordan* (1949). In the mid-1950s he returned to Europe and spent the balance of his life directing features in West Germany, Spain and France, but his reputation rests on his Hollywood suspense thrillers.

The next picture based on Woolrich showed that even with *Phantom Lady*'s success the B units had not forgotten him. Columbia, the first studio to release a crime film taken from Woolrich material, rejoined the parade when it bought rights to his 1942 novelette "Dormant Account" and turned it into *The Mark of the Whistler* (Columbia, 1944), the second in producer Rudolph C. Flothow's series of eight sixty-minute suspense film spinoffs from the popular *Whistler* radio dramas. It was a quite creditable quickie, directed on a budget of about $70,000 by William Castle (1914–1977), who later became well known for his gimmicky exploitation horror pictures, with a screenplay by B-movie veteran George Bricker that stayed remarkably close to the plot if not the mood of Woolrich's story. The star of all but the last Whistler film, Richard Dix, played the down-and-out who happens upon a notice in a discarded newspaper and decides to impersonate the rightful owner of a certain dormant bank account, thereby coming into both big money and big trouble in the form of a maniac out for vengeance on the money's true owner. Featured in key supporting roles were Janis Carter as the eager reporter covering Dix's rags-to-riches story, Porter Hall as the devious clothing-store owner who grubstakes Dix's plot, Paul Guilfoyle as the wistful little pencil seller and John Calvert as the vengeful madman. Only the last two characters came from Woolrich. The others were invented by Castle and Bricker and, along with several minor parts, they demonstrate the young Castle's knack for quirky offbeat characterizations.

The film's alterations in the Woolrich story line fall neatly into three categories. A few, such as raising the protagonist's age from twenty-seven to the early forties, were due to Richard Dix's mature looks. Others, such as the insistence at the end that Dix will be prosecuted for defrauding the bank, and The Whistler's incessant warnings that those who compromise with conscience must pay their debt to society, were required by the censors. Most of the changes, however, were designed to smooth out those elements in Woolrich's story which strained credibility too sorely. In the movie, for example, Dix's name really happens to be Lee Nugent, and since he has legitimate identification in that name as he never did in the story, the bank's acceptance of him as the owner of the dormant account makes more sense. Along the same lines, Castle adds a few brief scenes in mid-picture to explain, as Woolrich didn't, how the avenger picked up Nugent's trail after the bank paid him the money. And at the climax Castle deftly eliminates that absurd moment in the story where Donnelly boasts that for a long time he's had prepared an open grave in which he could bury his enemy with a limited air supply. All of these shifts combine with Dix's stoic low-key performance to transform Woolrich's story, terrifying and incredible as a nightmare, into a cool, controlled, circumstantially plausible little picture that keeps to the Woolrich plot but jettisons most of its power and tension.

No movies based on Woolrich were released during 1945, but by the end of that year he might pardonably have felt that as far as Hollywood was concerned he could do no wrong. During the last months of war and the first of uneasy peace, each of three major studios paid him sizable sums for rights to a different novel. He took in just under $20,000 in film money alone that year. The three pictures that were the fruit of these arrangements were released in 1946, each of them a generously budgeted *film noir* with not a B quickie in the lot.

The first of the trio to reach theaters was *Deadline at Dawn* (RKO, 1946), which had been completed in July of 1945. Woolrich's 1944 novel of the same name, which like *Phantom Lady* had been pubished under his William Irish byline, was a loosely constructed episodic work whose action takes place on a single night in the bleak streets and concrete catacombs of New York. By using clock faces for chapter heads, Woolrich made us literally watch the passage of time as his protagonists—a young man on the run from a murder he knows he'll be accused of come morning, and a feisty terrified little taxi dancer who sees the city as a personal enemy out to destroy her—encounter all sorts of disconnected *noir* characters and incidents in their frantic race to escape Manhattan before sunrise. The movie nominally based on this novel was earnest, ambitious and largely unsatisfying, the work of an assortment of artists who could and should have done better.

Four of the major talents behind the camera had roots in the left-wing theater movement of the 1930s. Producer Adrian Scott was blacklisted in the McCarthy era after refusing to kowtow to the House Un-American Activities Committee; director Harold Clurman (1901–1980) and playwright Clifford Odets (1906–1963), who wrote the screenplay as a favor for Clurman, had been key figures in New York's Group Theatre during the Depression; and Marxist composer Hanns Eisler was commissioned by RKO on Odets' recommendation to write the film's music score. These men might have given us a fascinating politicized version of Woolrich's novel but opted for a conventional whodunit with pretensions to Higher Meaning, more tightly constructed than the book but with none of its characters, almost none of its suspense, nothing even of its plot except the springboard situation, and no political content either.

Susan Hayward and Bill Williams starred as the couple remotely modeled on Woolrich's Bricky and Quinn (she's still a taxi dancer but since this is a wartime picture he is turned into a naively patriotic sailor), with Paul Lukas as a philosophical cab driver who furnishes free wheels as they try to find a murderer before dawn. The victim of the crime, a predatory bitch of the kind endemic to *film noir*, was played by Lola Lane. Among the people Hayward and Williams encounter on their quest are Osa Massen as a beautiful crippled woman, Joseph Calleia as Lane's gangster brother, Jerome Cowan who had also been in *Street of Chance*) as a Broadway hanger-on plagued by Lane's blackmail demands, Marvin Miller as a blind pianist once married to Lane and still in love with her, Steven Geray as a pathetic little immigrant with a platonic crush on Hayward, and Joe Sawyer as an alcoholic ballplayer with a parallel passion for Lane. Precious few of these characters come from Woolrich's novel (although Miller's sightless piano player is true to the Woolrich spirit) and most of them are wistful wimps, each with a tag line of dialogue repeated *ad nauseam*: Hayward's mournful "I hear the whistle blowing," Williams' self-deprecating "Non compos mentis" and his naive "and that's the truth!", Lukas's gently knowing "Statistics tell us," Geray's meek "Meaning no offense." It's not surprising that the great film critic James Agee qualified his generally favorable review in *The Nation* with a swat at the picture's "pseudo-realism and pseudo-poetry about the lost little people of a big city."

In his autobiography *All People Are Famous* (1974), Harold Clurman dismissed the film as "run-of-the-mill" and "of no importance." What he remembered best about the project, he said, was the time a censorship functionary visited the set to complain that Susan Hayward "was showing too much cleavage; but Miss Hayward and I insisted that this was one of the more pleasing features of the picture." Clurman's casual attitude was resented by the RKO front office, "perhaps because I finished the film on time and it proved moderately profitable." He never directed a movie again. Students of the screenwriter's work are also cool toward the picture. In his critical study *Odets the Playwright* (1985), Gerald Weales shrugs off the *Deadline at Dawn* script as "of minimal interest." One can appreciate his lack of enthusiasm for a screenplay whose protagonists step out of the apartment building where a woman was murdered and, trying to put themselves in the killer's place, decide that the first thing he must have done after the crime was to cross the street to the Nedick's stand and purchase a soothing glass of orangeade!

But the picture is far from a total loss. Every so often, as Bob Porfirio puts it, "by virtue of *mise-en-scène* alone, *Deadline at Dawn* captures . . . the quiet desperation of the nighttime people in New York City." The first scene with its anguished confrontation between the soon-to-be-murdered Lola Lane and her blind pianist ex-husband Marvin Miller is a *noir* classic, and eerily similar to the scene between the soon-to-be-murdered Constance Dowling and her alcoholic pianist ex-husband Dan Duryea in the very next Woolrich-based movie, *Black Angel*. (Nothing remotely like these scenes occurs in either Woolrich source novel.) In the outdoor sequences, which of course were shot in the studio, Clurman and *noir* cinematographer Nicholas Musuraca superbly caught the Woolrich image of the city in deep night. And amid Odets' bizarre notions of dialogue come a few lines which breathe the Woolrich spirit, for example when Lukas, telling how his wife had deserted him long ago, says: "For the first six years I shaved every night before I went to bed. I thought she might come back." By moments like these *Deadline at Dawn* is redeemed.

If that film was the weaker for having junked most of its source novel, the next movie based on Woolrich proved that the same procedure could result in a powerful picture true to the author's hopeless view of life. Woolrich's 1943 novel *The Black Angel* had described in first-person narration a terrified young wife's race against time to convince the police that her husband, convicted and sentenced to die for the murder of his mistress, is innocent and that one of the other men in the dead woman's life is guilty. Adopting a new persona each time, she invades the lives of several emotionally vulnerable men—a Bowery derelict, a drug-pushing doctor, a Park Avenue socialite and a lovelorn gangster—and destroys each of them, innocent and culpable alike. It's a wrenching, bizarre, episodically structured novel whose protagonist's obsessions grow to madness as she ruins others and herself to save her man from Mr. Death. On a literal level the movie based on this book has little in common with its source, yet paradoxically it's more Woolrich-like than many a more faithful adaptation of his fiction.

Black Angel (Universal, 1946) was directed and co-produced by British-born Roy William Neill (1886–1946), an industry old-timer fondly remembered for his Sherlock Holmes series with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. The screenplay was by veteran scripter Roy Chanslor, who set out with Neill to tighten the novel's structure, reduce the number of male characters, make the female lead more sympathetic, and at the same time preserve the Woolrich qualities of suspense and emotional anguish. The casting of the film was near perfect. June Vincent starred as the title character Catherine Bennett, and Dan Duryea as the alcoholic pianist Martin Blair, who is a composite of two men in the novel (the heartbroken drunk Martin Blair and the haunted socialite Ladd Mason) supplemented with touches of Marvin Miller's blind pianist character in *Deadline at Dawn* and with a few of the traits of Woolrich himself. The novel's Dr. Mordaunt episode was scrapped, and in the movie the M-monogrammed matchbook leads the black angel not to several men as in the book but only to one, nightclub owner Marko, who is more or less the counterpart of Woolrich's love-struck gambler McKee. The part of Marko went to that master of menace Peter Lorre. Broderick Crawford played Captain Flood, promoted from Woolrich's plainclothesman of the same name, and the key role of the predatory murdered woman, Mavis Marlowe, was enacted by Constance Dowling. The eighty-three-minute film was completed in May of 1946 and released in August.

Neill and Chanslor had no qualms about radically altering the

Woolrich novel. Besides the changes already described, the cinematic black angel doesn't carry out her quest alone as in the book but is joined by Dan Duryea's Marty Blair character. Although Woolrich's Marty kills himself after his brief encounter with the angel, Duryea not only lives through the picture but is recovering from his alcoholism by the fadeout. Duryea falls in love with June Vincent somewhat as Woolrich's Ladd Mason had with the black angel, but in the movie Vincent doesn't return his love but stays loyal to her convicted and philandering husband. Yet despite these changes and many more, every frame of this magnificent *film noir* is permeated with the Woolrich spirit. From the opening sequence with its complex boom shot from the street to the interior of Mavis Marlowe's penthouse, through the climax with its expressionist re-creation of Marlowe's murder through Marty's drunken consciousness, Neill and cinematographer Paul Ivano invest every shot with a visual style that translates Woolrich into film precisely as any novel needs to be translated: with total fidelity to its essence and little if any to its literal text. If a single theatrical feature based on a Woolrich book could be preserved for future generations and all the rest had to be destroyed, *Black Angel* is the one I would opt to keep. It was Roy William Neill's best film, and his last.

In November of 1965, less than two years before his own death, Basil Rathbone in a talk before a group of Sherlock Holmes fans described how the director of so many Holmes movies and of *Black Angel* had died. Late in 1946, Rathbone said, he was appearing on Broadway in a production of *The Heiress*.

> One night to the theatre came dear little Roy Neill. We loved him. We called him Muggsy. He was a little guy and sweet as they come, though a damn good disciplinarian. We called him Muggsy and he was very sweet with us but we didn't disobey orders and we were always on time and we always knew our lines. . . . There came to my dressing room, in a gray flannel suit and a white carnation, little Roy Neill. And he was going home, which was Maidenhead on the Thames, in England, for the first time in, oh, some very very long time, something like fifteen-odd years. And he was very emotional about this, and took the keys out of his pocket, and he showed me one and said to me: "Do you see that key? That opens the door to my home at Maidenhead on the Thames." And he had had a housekeeper stay there for all this time, waiting for this wonderful moment when, after making substantial money, he was able now to go home and enjoy his life on the river Thames. And he boarded the ship, and—I

> only learned this later—and he arrived, and he went to Maidenhead, and he put the key into the front door, he turned it, and walked into the hall of his home, and dropped dead.

The brief obituary on Neill in the *New York Times* reports only that the fifty-nine-year-old director had died of a heart attack in the London home of a nephew. But if Rathbone wasn't embellishing the facts for the sake of a good anecdote, what a Woolrich-like death for the man who had just made the finest film yet based on a Woolrich movie!

Woolrich himself thought Neill's picture a disaster. Early in 1947, after receiving a letter in which the Columbia-based poet and scholar Mark Van Doren mentioned having recently seen the movie, Woolrich left his mother and the Hotel Marseilles for a few hours and went to see it himself at a neighborhood theater. "I was so ashamed when I came out of there," he wrote to Van Doren on February 2. "All I could keep thinking of in the dark was: Is *that* what I wasted my whole life at?" Clearly Woolrich's talent for film criticism was as meager as his contempt for himself was boundless. Whether out of good sense or lack of clout, he at least never tried to tell Neill or other moviemakers how to adapt his work.

The third and most controversial of the Woolrich-based movies released in 1946 was *The Chase* (United Artists, 1946), an eighty-six-minute picture directed by the erratic Arthur Ripley (1895–1961) from a screenplay by playwright Philip Yordan that was very loosely derived from Woolrich's 1944 novel *The Black Path of Fear*. In the book, Bill Scott escapes from Miami to Havana with Eve, the wife of American gangster Eddie Roman, whose Cuban agents kill the woman and frame her lover, leaving Scott a stranger in a strange land, menaced on all sides and fighting for his life. More than any other Woolrich novel, this one combines prototypical *noir* elements—love discovered and then snuffed out, a man alone hunted through a nightmare city—with an ambience of dope dens and sinister Orientals and secret passages and hair's-breadth escapes straight out of the whizbang pulps. Ripley and Yordan scrapped not only all the pulp stuff but most of Woolrich's plot too, and tried to capture the book's essence visually. Robert Cummings—with his light-romantic manner a most unlikely *noir* protagonist, although he was given such parts by directors as diverse as Alfred Hitchcock (in *Saboteur*, 1942) and Anthony Mann (in *Reign of Terror*, 1949)—starred as Chuck Scott, with the lovely French import Michele Morgan as Lorna Roman, Steve Cochran as the vengeful husband Eddie and *Black Angel*'s Peter Lorre as Eddie's hitman Gino.

As retold by Ripley and Yordan the story avoids Woolrich's flashbacks and proceeds in chronological order. Scott, a down-at-heels war veteran, becomes Eddie Roman's chauffeur after returning the gangster's lost wallet intact, and eventually falls in love with Lorna and agrees to flee with her to Cuba. So far so faithful to the novel, but then the filmmakers start playing games with the story line and make it go haywire. The day he's to elope with Lorna, Chuck suffers a relapse of the malarial fever he contracted in the Navy and *dreams* the events that make up the bulk of the book: the stabbing death of Lorna in the Havana nightclub, his own arrest by and escape from the Cuban cop Acosta (Alexis Minotis) and his encounter with the prostitute Midnight (Yolanda Lacca). In due course he discovers that Lorna was killed by Eddie's pet assassin Gino, but at this point he is himself shot to death and awakens from his fever dream. Unfortunately Chuck's malaria is compounded by a case of *film noir*'s favorite disease, amnesia: he has no recollection of his plans to escape from Miami with Lorna until a military doctor (Jack Holt) pulls him out of his forgetfulness. At the film's climax Eddie and Gino die gruesomely in an auto wreck that causes most viewers to giggle, while Chuck and Lorna disembark at Havana and find the same coachman and nightclub that figured in Chuck's dream.

Noir critic Bob Porfirio ranks *The Chase* second only to Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* as a "cinematic equivalent of the dark, oppressive atmosphere" of Woolrich, thanks to its dreamlike ambience, "especially at the conclusion, which collapses the distinction between dream and reality; its eroticism, particularly in the scene where Roman sexually badgers and then abuses his female barber and manicurist; its unprecedented elements, such as the dreamed death of the hero; and its aspects of cruelty and ambivalence. . . ." Other commentators ridicule the film as a chaotic botch, full of unintentionally funny blunders. Of all the Woolrich-based pictures *The Chase* is the one most likely to provoke an argument among *noir* aficionados. In any event it was the last A feature adapted from his work for almost two years.

The three movies derived from Woolrich material that came out in 1947—all of them within a month's time in early spring—were low-budget efforts, based not on novels but on short stories or novelettes which cost less, and staffed by unknowns on both sides of the camera. Two of the trio were made by Monogram Pictures, the Poverty Row outfit which back in 1934 had filmed a comic *Manhattan Love Song* nominally based on Woolrich's tragic novel of the same name. By the forties the studio was churning out reams of el cheapo product: Westerns, East Side Kids flicks, Bela Lugosi screamers, Charlie Chans and, once the genre had established itself, *films noirs*. In 1946 Monogram bought movie rights to a pair of Woolrich novelettes and put two different casts and crews to work almost cheek-by-jowl among tatty indoor sets. Both pictures were completed in November of that year and released to bottom-rung theaters in March of 1947.

After resurfacing on countless TV late late shows during the fifties they sank out of sight, and so far not even cable has resurrected them.

Fall Guy (Monogram, 1947), whose working title was *One Way Street*, was produced by Walter Mirisch, who would later rise to moguldom in the industry. Its Vienna-born director, perennial B-movie hack Reginald LeBorg (b.1902), had just completed a string of Universal horror-suspensers starring Lon Chaney, Jr. The screenplay by Jerry Warner was based on Woolrich's 1940 story "C-Jag," better known as "Cocaine." But LeBorg and Warner kept little of the story beyond its springboard situation. A young man comes out of a drug haze with blurred memories of a party, a body in a closet and a bloody knife, then finds blood on his shirt and the knife in his pocket. He tells his police detective brother-in-law and the two hunt desperately for the murder scene and the body, if either exists outside the young man's dreams. The totally unknown Clifford Penn starred as Tom Cochrane, and Robert Armstrong, fondly remembered for his role in *King Kong* (1933), played homicide cop Mac McClane. Three of the people they run into on their quest—the sleazy elevator operator (Elisha Cook, Jr.) and the happy-go-lucky party-throwing couple (John Harmon and Iris Adrian)—are rooted in Woolrich's story, and the sequence in that couple's apartment, with its closet where the hunted corpse might be but isn't, does resemble the parallel scene in Woolrich. All the other characters and plot elements in the movie spring from the less than vivid imaginations of Jerry Warner and Reginald LeBorg. Tom's girlfriend Lois Walters (Teala Loring), Lois's guardian "Uncle Jim" Grosset (Charles Arnt), the singer Marie (Virginia Dale) and her boyfriend Mike the vengeful boxer (Jack Overman), and tough-talking Inspector Shannon (Douglas Fowley) have no counterparts in the Woolrich story. The closeted body in "C-Jag" is that of a man and the plot revolves around a standard gangland double-cross; in the movie it's that of a woman whose blackmail victim has concocted an elaborate murder-and-frameup scheme to get rid of her. The filmmakers left out the memorable "singing walls" sequence which had been the leitmotif of the radio version of the story on CBS's *Suspense*, and tossed in a handful of mind-boggling plot twists for their climax. An occasional line of voice-over flashback narrative might almost have come from Woolrich ("My brain rattled inside like the tongue of a bell, my eyes forgot how to see"), and a few shots evoke a passable *noir* mood. The rest of *Fall Guy*'s sixty-four minutes, much like LeBorg's later quickies for Monogram and Lippert and other independents, is dreary routine.

While that picture was under way, another low-budget producer named Jack Wrather was using the same studio facilities for a Woolrich-based film of his own. *The Guilty* (Monogram, 1947), a seventy-one-minute time-waster completed just after Thanksgiving of

1946, was directed by German émigré John Reinhardt (1901–1953) from a screenplay by B stalwart Robert R. Presnell, Sr., that was loosely derived from Woolrich's 1941 novelette "He Looked Like Murder," better known as "Two Fellows in a Furnished Room." But like Reginald LeBorg and Jerry Warner across the Monogram lot, Reinhardt and Presnell revamped their source material to the point of ruination. Both the film and Woolrich's story start with the same premise: slowly and against his will, a young man comes to believe that his roommate and best buddy brutally murdered his girlfriend and stuffed her body into an incinerator. Many of the picture's later plot developments come from Woolrich more or less intact. The suspect protests his innocence, claims he can clear himself if he can find a certain Phantom Lady who whistles, goes on the run, is tracked down by his buddy and then released when the buddy tracks down the whistling woman and pins the murder on a kindly old uncle figure. But the director and screenwriter superimposed on this layer of the film a catalogue of all the most familiar elements of late-1940s *cinema noir*. One: Almost the entire picture is told in flashback as, some time after the main events, Mike Carr returns to his old neighborhood and tells his tale to the bartender in the local tavern. Two: Carr's roommate Johnny Dixon, the guy accused of the murder, is transformed into that ikon of post-Hiroshima *noir*, The Mentally Disturbed War Veteran. Three: Rather than settle for one key female character as Woolrich did, Reinhardt and Presnell split her in two, turning the murdered girlfriend into yet another *noir* cliché, The Twin Sisters, One Good, One Evil. Then at the end of the long long flashback sequence they drag in one more whiskered *noir* device by having their viewpoint character Carr turn out himself to be the murderer.

The casting of the picture was as routine as everything else about it. Bonita Granville, producer Wrather's wife, played the twins, with B-movie tough guy Don Castle as Carr and Wally Cassell as Dixon. Regis Toomey played Heller, the plainclothesman in charge of the murder case, and John Litel had the part of the avuncular character who in Woolrich's novelette was indeed the killer. Reinhardt manages to evoke a convincingly claustrophobic atmosphere—much of it due less to his directorial skill than to a very tight budget—but there isn't much else to recommend in this *noir* quickie. Jack Wrather's main claim to fame is not this picture or any other movie he produced but his membership in President Reagan's "kitchen cabinet" and his company's TV series such as *Lassie* and *The Lone Ranger*.

That same spring, a much more prestigious studio was putting into release yet another low-budget picture adapted from Woolrich. *Fear in the Night* (Paramount, 1947) was a production of the so-called Dollar Bills, William H. Pine and William C. Thomas, whose excellent B action films had been released by Paramount since the late 1930s.

Many of the earlier Pine–Thomas movies had been scripted by Maxwell Shane (1905–1984), and it was Shane who both wrote and directed *Fear in the Night*. In both script and visual style Shane kept remarkably faithful to the plot, characters and spirit of Woolrich's 1941 novelette "And So to Death," better known as "Nightmare." The story is quite similar to "C-Jag," which had been the basis of Monogram's *Fall Guy*, and moviegoers who saw both pictures close together might have wondered if Woolrich had sold the same tale to two studios. Shane signed a young Hollywood newcomer named DeForest Kelley, who later went on to fame in TV's *Star Trek* series, to play Vince Grayson (Vincent Hardy in Woolrich's story), the hapless bank teller who wakes up from a nightmare about committing a murder in a mirror-walled octagonal room, only to find objective fragments from the dream in his pockets and on his body. Veteran B actor Paul Kelly portrayed Vince's brother-in-law, plainclothesman Cliff Herlihy (Cliff Dodge in Woolrich's story), who becomes determined to find out whether his wife's brother is a mental case, a murderer or the victim of a Svengali. Ann Doran was cast as Cliff's wife Lil and Kay Scott as Vince's girlfriend Betty Winters (the only major character invented by Shane), with Robert Emmett Keane playing the evil hypnotist. Where Shane changed Woolrich's story—for example at the climax, which is filmed from a detached viewpoint rather than confined to the narrator's consciousness as "And So to Death" was—the alterations are improvements. Where he had to create visual correlatives to Vince's hallucinations, he did excellently: the opening sequence recounting the bloody dream of murder is a classic, and later when DeForest Kelley's thoughts flash back to the nightmare, Shane superimposes an extreme close-up of the actor's eyes over repeat footage of the stabbing. Shane's direction of the principal players superbly caught the contours of Woolrich's characters, with Kelley turning in a near-somnambulistic performance as the haunted dreamer and Paul Kelly evoking both the humanity and the sadistic streak in the prototypical Woolrich cop. *Fear in the Night* is a seventy-one-minute gem of *noir* on a shoestring, the finest by far of the B pictures based on a Woolrich short story or novelette.

One of the poorest quickies to be made in Hollywood from Woolrich material came next with *The Return of the Whistler* (Columbia, 1948), eighth and last of producer Rudolph C. Flothow's low-budget tie-ins with the *Whistler* radio series. Richard Dix, the star of the first seven Whistler films, had been forced to retire after several heart attacks which eventually, in September 1949, were to kill him. Columbia thought it could save the series by reworking the format, using obscure actors and stressing story values and suspense, and therefore bought screen rights to Woolrich's 1940 novelette "All at Once, No Alice" as the basis for the next Whistler exploit. It was an ideal choice for Columbia's purpose, a throat-catching *noir* thriller whose protagonist marries a woman he's known for only a week but then can't prove she ever existed when she vanishes on their wedding night from a hotel room and everyone who saw them swears that the man was unaccompanied by a woman. Almost none of Woolrich's plot and not a scintilla of his emotional power and suspense survived into the movie.

The Return of the Whistler was directed by B movie hack D. Ross Lederman (1895–1972) from a screenplay by Edward Bock and Maurice Tombragel which kept just a few bare bones from the Woolrich tale. The picture opens on a Snoopyesque dark and stormy night as Ted Nichols (Michael Duane) is eloping with French-born Alice Duprez (Lenore Aubert), whom he's known for a few short weeks. They stop at the house of a Justice of the Peace but unlike their counterparts in Woolrich they don't get married, for the Justice isn't home. While they're inside a shadowy figure sabotages their car, and they're forced to stop for the night at a nearby small town that boasts only one hotel with exactly one vacant room. Nichols settles his fiancée in for the night, then goes off to spend the wee hours at an auto repair shop. When he comes back to the hotel in the morning, the clerk who checked Alice in claims that she walked out during the night. No one denies the woman's existence. Bang! There went the *raison d'être* of Woolrich's novelette, replaced by Lederman and the screenwriters with a tame and leaden-paced little throwaway. The rest of the picture recounts Nichols' efforts to find Alice, but the characters and events from here on have nothing in common with Woolrich. It turns out that greedy relatives have railroaded her into a shady sanitarium from which Nichols saves her with an assist from private eye Gaylord Traynor (Richard Lane). The film quickly sank into oblivion and the Whistler series went under with it.

Not long afterward, Monogram Pictures brought out its third B thriller based on Woolrich and its second to be produced by Walter Mirisch. The seventy-minute *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* (Monogram, 1948) was directed by William Nigh (1881–1955), one of the industry's most pedestrian hacks, and was adapted from Woolrich's haunting 1938 novelette of the same name, in which an insignificant man is sentenced to die in the electric chair because one stifling hot night he had thrown a pair of shoes out his open window at a yowling cat. The suspense mounts as the man's wife and an enigmatic homicide detective race the clock to find new evidence that will stop the execution. They succeed in the nick of time, but a tauntingly ambiguous plot twist at the climax throws the protagonists back into chaos and destroys their marriage. The person chosen to turn this nightmare into a viable screenplay was Woolrich's pulp compadre Steve Fisher, who in his own classic *roman noir I Wake Up Screaming* (1941) had used Woolrich as the model for the corrupt and psychotic cop whose sexual obsessions led him to frame the protagonist for murder. As we've seen earlier in this book, Fisher couldn't come up with a rational ending for the *Shoes* screenplay and appealed to Woolrich himself, who suggested in a phone conversation that Fisher borrow from *I Wake Up Screaming* and turn the homicide cop into the heavy, motivated by lust for the framed man's wife. Don Castle from *The Guilty* played the hapless protagonist, with Elyse Knox as his wife and Regis Toomey, also from *The Guilty*, as the murderous detective. Bob Porfirio describes the film as "rather standard Monogram fare, photographed competently . . . and acted in the same manner by the cast." Thin praise, fair judgment.

The third, last and certainly most ambitious of the year's Woolrich-based movies was *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (Paramount, 1948), adapted from the classic 1945 novel of the same name. Of all Woolrich's books this is the one most completely dominated by death and fate. A simple-minded recluse with apparently uncanny powers predicts that millionaire Harlan Reid will die in three weeks, precisely at midnight, by the jaws of a lion, and the tension rises to unbearable pitch as the doomed man and his daughter Jean and the sympathetic young homicide detective Tom Shawn struggle to avert a destiny which they at first suspect and soon come to pray was conceived by a merely human power. It's the kind of waking nightmare that is the essence of *noir*, and Woolrich makes us live the emotional torment and suspense of the situation until we are literally shivering in our seats. The movie doesn't, and what it substitutes is bland fare indeed.

Paramount director John Farrow (1904–1963) made the film from a screenplay by Barré Lyndon and hardboiled mystery writer Jonathan Latimer (1906–1983), but their version had little connection with the novel and almost none of its power and terror. Edward G. Robinson starred as John Triton, the cinematic stand-in for Woolrich's haunted prophet Jeremiah Tompkins, with Gail Russell as Jean Courtland (Jean Reid in the novel), John Lund as her boyfriend Elliott Carson (who doesn't exist in the novel), and William Demarest as a skeptical and middle-aged Lieutenant Shawn. The picture opens with a striking scene vaguely like the beginning of the novel as Russell, pursued by Lund, wanders trancelike through a railroad yard to a high bridge from which she feels a compulsion to jump to her death. Lund saves her and brings her back to the coffee shop where Robinson is waiting. In a flashback sequence that's exceptionally long even for *film noir*, Robinson tells the young couple how years ago, while working as a phony vaudeville mindreader, he suddenly found himself endowed with what he claims is true clairvoyant power—primarily the power to foresee deaths and disasters. He correctly predicted the death of Russell's father in a plane crash, and in due course he reveals his prevision that she will die at the feet of a lion at precisely 11:00 P.M. The film then mutates into a standard whodunit padded with discussions of whether there's a scientific basis for ESP. Finally Robinson convinces the police that his powers are real, rushes to save Russell from the idiot plot by one of her father's business associates to kill her, and is mistakenly shot to death by the detectives who were her bodyguards. In his pocket the police find a note in which he predicted his own death that night.

"What I hoped to establish," Jonathan Latimer claimed in an interview near the end of his life, "was a real sense of terror that these things were coming true." This is precisely what Woolrich wanted too, but the radical alterations of Farrow and the writers frustrated that hope. Their revised story line is both silly and unsuspenseful, depending on several interlocked ridiculous contrivances which critic Gordon Gow's *Suspense in the Cinema* (1968) dissects in great detail. The film's strong points are Farrow's stylish direction and Robinson's fine performance as a sort of Woolrich surrogate, a man whose gift has turned him into a half-crazed recluse obsessed by the inevitability of fate. But one senses the hand of the devoutly Catholic Farrow in the climax where Robinson becomes a Jesus figure, choosing to go to his own death so that his quasi-daughter might live.

Until this point there had been a clear pattern in Hollywood's use of Woolrich material: A pictures with decent production values had been made out of the novels and B quickies out of the shorter fiction. The next Woolrich-based film may have been intended to stay within the pattern, but it was so well made and so successful that it broke the tradition, proving that a big hit could be adapted from a Woolrich short story or novelette and thus in a sense paving the way for Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* a few years later. *The Window* (RKO, 1949) was based on Woolrich's superb 1947 novelette "The Boy Cried Murder," also known as "Fire Escape." One night during a heat wave, twelve-year-old Buddy climbs out on the fire escape of the New York tenement he and his working-class parents live in, and witnesses a brutal murder committed by their upstairs neighbors. But because he has a reputation for spinning tall stories, no one will believe him, not his parents, not the police—only the killers, who set out to make the boy their next victim. With a *noir* premise so powerful, and a novelette that squeezed every ounce of tension from the situation, it was hardly surprising that "The Boy Cried Murder" sold to a studio almost at once.

Chosen to direct *The Window* was former cinematographer Ted Tetzlaff (b.1903), who had manned the cameras on Hitchcock's *Notorious* back in 1946. The screenplay was by Mel Dinelli, who had earlier scripted another they-won't-believe-I-witnessed-a-murder thriller, Robert Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* (1946). Young Bobby

Driscoll starred as Tommy Woodry, with Arthur Kennedy and Barbara Hale as his hardworking and long-suffering parents, and Paul Stewart and Ruth Roman as the deadly couple upstairs. Tetzlaff and Dinelli kept the film close to both the story line and specific incidents in Woolrich's novelette, and most of their alterations—like constructing scenes where the boy who was Woolrich's viewpoint character is not present, or expanding the climax in the condemned building where the boy is stalked by the killers—stay faithful to Woolrich's intent and add to the picture's suspense. Tetzlaff took pains to find visual correlatives for Woolrich's *noir* mood, playing off the neorealist look of the characters' sweltering tenement existence against the expressionist duels of light and shadow in the nighttime terror sequences. In a few respects *The Window* is softer than "The Boy Cried Murder": Tommy's parents are portrayed as decent and caring people, without the brutal edge Woolrich gives them, and the victim whose murder the boy witnessed is not carved up with a razor as in Woolrich but transported whole out of the tenement and across the rooftops. The movie ends happily, but then so does the Woolrich version. Lacking any major stars and running a scant seventy-three minutes, *The Window* transcended its modest circumstances to become a runaway box-office success, and even today it stands up nicely as one of the many American suspense films which, while neither as visually innovative nor as existentially multileveled as the masterpieces of Hitchcock, are squarely in the Hitchcock (and Woolrich) tradition of nonstop nail-biting terror.

At the end of the forties only four of Woolrich's major crime novels were still unfilmed: *The Bride Wore Black* (1940) and *Waltz into Darkness* (1947), both of which would be brought to the screen in the sixties, plus *Rendezvous in Black* (1948) and *I Married a Dead Man* (1948). It was from the last of these that Hollywood took its only Woolrich-based picture of 1950. In the novel, one of the finest and bleakest in the canon, Helen Georgesson, a pregnant woman with nothing to live for and in flight from her sadistic lover, is injured in a train wreck while in the ladies' room with Patrice Hazzard, another pregnant woman. Wrongly identified in the hospital as Patrice, who had died in the train disaster, Helen goes along with the deception, pretends to be the daughter-in-law whom Hugh Hazzard's wealthy parents had never met and enters what seems to be a heaven-sent new life, even falling in love with Hugh's brother Bill. Then the real father of her child invades her world, and her miraculous second chance becomes a curse from the evil god at the heart of being. The radically offbeat climax offers us two possibilities, each of them unthinkable: either Helen the viewpoint character has been lying to us throughout, or Bill who desperately loves her has been lying to Helen. Woolrich's point, as we've seen, is that logic doesn't work and the world is abandoned to the powers of darkness.

This hardly seems the kind of novel that would command Hollywood's attention, but it made a strong impression on director Mitchell Leisen (1898–1972), Paramount Pictures' resident specialist in sophisticated comedies and so-called women's films. Leisen shared his enthusiasm with one of the studio's top stars, Barbara Stanwyck, and suggested that she pressure Paramount into buying screen rights so that Leisen could adapt the novel into a Stanwyck vehicle. Such was the genesis of *No Man of Her Own* (Paramount, 1950), a glossy and well-mounted ninety-eight-minute picture, shot by Leisen in June and July of 1949 and released the following February. Stanwyck as the tormented Helen Ferguson was supported by John Lund (who had also had a major role in Paramount's *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*) as Bill Harkness, Phyllis Thaxter as Patrice, Richard Denning as Hugh Harkness, Lyle Bettger as menacing Steve Morley, and Milburn Stone, the beloved Doc of TV's *Gunsmoke*, as a homicide detective.

According to David Chierichetti's book on Leisen, *Hollywood Director* (1973), Leisen contributed a great deal without credit to the script, which was officially written by Sally Benson and Catherine Turney. Stanwyck, Leisen recalled, "did all of her own stunts in the picture. To stage the train wreck, we built the set of the ladies' room inside an enormous wheel, about twenty feet in diameter. We rotated the wheel to make the train crash and roll over, and Barbara and Phyllis Thaxter were right in there, falling from side to side."

No Man of Her Own is a well-acted and stylishly directed movie, with the peace and serenity of the Hazzard household counterpointing the anguish and suspense of the sequences in which Stanwyck is in jeopardy. But even though the picture stays strikingly faithful to the novel's plot almost to the fadeout, Woolrich's *noir* spirit is lost. Part of the problem lies in the casting. Beautifully coiffed and suffering nobly in the best weepie tradition, Stanwyck looks at least twenty years too old to play Woolrich's terrified and inexperienced Helen. Even more fatal to the movie was Leisen's decision to scrap the novel's impossible but inevitable ending and instead have a character who had made a split-second appearance in an early scene suddenly come back into the picture and blurt out a confession which cuts the Gordian knot and assures Stanwyck and Lund of happiness-ever-after. It's the closest Mitchell Leisen ever came to *film noir* and ranks among the best of the director's later pictures, but in the light of Woolrich's novel one can only say: So near and yet so far!

After *No Man of Her Own* the steady stream of Woolrich-based Hollywood movies suddenly dried up. The main reason of course was that competition from television was forcing the studios to make fewer and fewer pictures per year. But TV discovered Woolrich's potential very early in its history, and both live and filmed versions of his fiction, which will be discussed in a later chapter, proliferated on the small screen during the fifties. The only known theatrical films taken from Woolrich sources during the first years of the decade were three quickies made in Argentina and apparently never shown outside Latin America. *El Pendiente* (1951), based on Woolrich's 1943 novelette "The Death Stone"/"The Earring," was directed by León Klimovsky from a screenplay by Ulyses Petit de Murat and Samuel Eichelbaum, and featured Mirtha Legrand, Jose Cibrián, Francisco de Paula, Héctor Calcaño and Raúl del Valle. *Si Muero Antes de Despertar* (1952) was directed by Carlos Hugo Christensen from a screenplay by Alejandro Casona based on Woolrich's 1937 novelette "If I Should Die Before I Wake." The cast included Néstor Lavarce, Floren Delbene, Blanca del Prado, Homero Cárpena and Maria Angélica Troncoso. And *No Abras Nunca Esa Puerta* (1952), which translates as *Don't Ever Open That Door*, was likewise directed by Christensen from a Casona script, but this one was cobbled together from two Woolrich stories of 1937, "Somebody on the Phone" and "Humming Bird Comes Home." In the cast were Angel Magaña, Roberto Escalada, Renée Dumas, Norma Giménez and Nicolás Fregues.

On the other hand, the next American film based on Woolrich made almost all its predecessors look feeble. Its source was "It Had To Be Murder" (1942), which had been included in the collection *After-Dinner Story* under the more evocative title "Rear Window." The narrator Jeffries, confined to his New York apartment with a broken leg, whiles away the lonely nights by staring out his rear window and through those of his neighbors, observing their lives like a curious god. He soon comes to suspect on highly circumstantial evidence that one of them, jewelry salesman Lars Thorwald, has murdered his wife and disposed of various parts of her body around the city. Conceptually this story has much in common with 1947's "The Boy Cried Murder," with the major difference that in "Rear Window" we don't know all along that the viewpoint character's murder accusation is correct but are made to oscillate between thinking he's right and deciding that he's the victim of a diseased imagination. Finally Jeffries sees that Thorwald has discovered his invisible observer's identity, and waits alone and helpless in his invalid's chair for a visit from the murderer. This carefully constructed story, rich in tension and detailed setting and *noir* ambience, brought Woolrich for the first time to the attention of his cinematic counterpart, the director whose name is synonymous with suspense.

Thanks to Donald Spoto's superb biography *The Dark Side of Genius* (1983), which mentions Woolrich only in passing, we can see that that haunted man and Alfred Hitchcock (1899–1980) were soul brothers. Someone will eventually write at length about the affinity between these superficially dissimilar men. No doubt that essay will explore the common factors in their lives that led them both to perceive the world as a hideous and terrifying place, and the longing for physical relationships which the obesity of the one man and the homosexuality of the other seemed to put forever out of reach. This is not the place for such speculations. We don't know whether Hitchcock, who was an omnivorous reader, had encountered Woolrich's fiction before, but very likely he hadn't. Even in the negotiations over "Rear Window" there was little if any contact with Woolrich, for the director bought screen rights to the story from another party who, back in the 1940s, had purchased the movie rights to all six of the tales collected in *After-Dinner Story* for a modest $5,000. That deal had been made for Woolrich by movie agent H.N. Swanson, the same man who, as editor of *College Humor* in the twenties, had bought some of the young Woolrich's earliest short stories. Years later, after the Hitchcock film had become a smash hit, Woolrich naturally enough was irked at Swanson for selling the stories at that price. "He sold *everything* for five thousand dollars," Woolrich told Barry Malzberg in the late sixties. "That's why we all called him Five Grand Swanie."

He may not have made much money on the deal, but it was the first time a Woolrich story was transformed by an unarguably world-class director into a film so captivating that whole chapters of books have been devoted to its explication. *Rear Window* (Paramount, 1954) was directed by Hitchcock from a screenplay by John Michael Hayes, starring James Stewart as Jeffries and Grace Kelly as his fashion-designer girlfriend Lisa Fremont. Thelma Ritter was featured as the friendly-snoopy visiting nurse Stella, Wendell Corey as skeptical but open-minded Lieutenant Doyle, and Raymond Burr as Thorwald. My remarks here are no substitute for the chapters on *Rear Window* by Robin Wood (in *Hitchcock's Films*, 1965), Donald Spoto (in *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, 1976) and others. But since even these first-rate critics tend to give short shrift to Hitchcock's literary sources, it may be useful to supplement their accounts by discussing how much of Woolrich survives in this particular film.

In preparing *Rear Window*, Hitchcock and Hayes had to find a way of turning a short story into a picture that would hold the attention for two hours' running time. This they accomplished by integrating into the movie a host of major and minor characters and an abundance of themes that were either absent from the Woolrich story or barely hinted at, while at the same time keeping the story's plot structure almost exactly as Woolrich had put it together. The measure of Hitchcock's genius is that the fusion of new and genuinely Woolrichian elements produced not a patchwork but a beautifully unified film.

One aspect of the movie that has been praised as uniquely cinematic is the way Hitchcock limits our viewpoint throughout all but a f seconds of *Rear Window* to what the immobilized Jimmy Stewart c see from the titular windows of his apartment. But even a qui reading of the Woolrich story—which he submitted under the ti "Murder from a Fixed Viewpoint"—will show that this device of t filmmakers is simply a translation of the story's material into visu terms. The magnificent execution should be credited to Hitchcock a Hayes but the idea clearly originated in large part from Woolri himself.

The characterizations on the other hand owe very little to t Woolrich story. The Jeffries we meet in print is not only a ma immobilized but, like so many Woolrich protagonists, a man alone. visualized by Hitchcock and portrayed by Stewart, Jeffries is stunningly complex character; as drawn by Woolrich he's virtually blank slate, with no one even to talk to except the compassiona black houseman Sam whom Hitchcock drops from the film. But b adding the Grace Kelly and Thelma Ritter characters, who have n counterparts in Woolrich, and by expanding Wendell Corey's role a the police detective, Hitchcock opened the door to the network relationships which distinguish the Stewart character in the pictur

One of the blank-slate aspects of Woolrich's Jeffries is that we ar never told what he does for a living. In the film he's a professiona photographer, a man whose job involves a sort of spying on people, s that it's completely in character for Stewart to pass the long hot day and nights peering into his neighbors' lives through his telephoto lens By limiting us to Stewart's viewpoint, Hitchcock in effect tells us tha we are sick voyeurs just like his charming protagonist. There are hint of this motif in Woolrich's story. "Why is [Thorwald] so interested i other people's windows, I wondered detachedly. And of course a effective brake to dwelling on that thought too lingeringly clampe down almost at once: Look who's talking. What about you yourself?" But Hitchcock elevated the voyeurism theme into one of the centra elements in the film.

> Jeffries: I wonder if it's ethical to watch a man with binoculars and a long-focus lens. Do you suppose it's ethical even if you prove he *didn't* commit a crime?
>
> Lisa: I'm not much on rear-window ethics. . . . Look at you and me, plunged into despair because we find out a man *didn't* kill his wife. We're two of the most frightening ghouls I've ever known.

Another central motif of the movie stems from the barest hint in the story. As presented by Woolrich, most of Jeffries' spying is concentrated on Thorwald, and the other neighbors into whose lives he peers are given only a few poignant paragraphs. Hitchcock creates more neighbors—Miss Lonelyhearts, Miss Torso, the composer, the honeymooners, the middle-aged couple with the dog—and makes each a vivid character in his or her own right. Even more important is the thematic use Hitchcock makes of the neighbors, each person representing Stewart's vision of one of his own possible futures if he makes a real commitment to Grace Kelly. This motif, fully elaborated in Spoto's *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* and elsewhere, has no more basis in Woolrich than does the Kelly character herself.

On the level of plot Hitchcock followed the story quite closely, keeping intact the springboard situation, the did-he-or-didn't-he oscillations and the hair-raising suspense climax. But thanks to all the nuances of theme and character and mood that he grafted onto the story's structure—not just the ones already mentioned but the heat wave and the steady stream of light bantering dialogue with dark implications—*Rear Window* the movie evolved into something worlds removed from "Rear Window" as Woolrich wrote it: richer, lighter, deeper, less obsessive and claustrophobic but no less suspenseful.

Whether Woolrich was happy with the picture is unclear, and in fact he may never have gone to see it. "Hitchcock wouldn't even send me a ticket to the premiere in New York," he told Barry Malzberg. "He knew where I lived. He wouldn't even send me a ticket."

Within a few months of *Rear Window*'s release, the first major French film taken from a Woolrich source opened in Paris. During the ten years since that country's liberation from the Nazis, Woolrich's novels and stories had been extensively published in French translation and lavishly praised for their quality of existential *noir*. The same tone pervaded the hundred-and-four-minute color feature *Obsession* (Gibé, 1954), which was directed by one of the better-known pre–New Wave French filmmakers, Jean Delannoy (b.1908), from a screenplay by Antoine Blondin, Roland Laudenbach and Delannoy himself. Like the Argentine *No Abras Nunca Esa Puerta* it was based not on one Woolrich short story but two: "If the Dead Could Talk" (1943), about a fatal love triangle among two men and a woman in a circus high-wire act, and "Silent As the Grave" (1945), in which a marriage is destroyed when a woman breaks her vow never to repeat her husband's confession that he once killed someone. Delannoy and his collaborators combined the elements of these tales into a movie in the mainstream of *film noir à la français*. The woman in the high-flying triangle was played by Michele Morgan, the female lead in *The Chase* eight years earlier. Italian macho star Raf Vallone was cast as Aldo, under another name the deceased narrator of Woolrich's "If the Dead Could Talk," and Jean Gaven as Alex, Vallone's rival for Morgan. Both of the Woolrich stories stressed emotional anguish and downbeat irony rather than suspense, and so does Delannoy. Morgan and

Vallone are partners in a high-wire act. Only when she tells him she's going to get married does he blurt out that he loves her. The reason he's said nothing about his love, he explains, is that he once killed a man in a fight (although the authorities ruled the death a suicide) and has been afraid of being arrested ever since. The two become lovers and are happy until Morgan sprains her arm and Gaven is hired to help out in the trapeze act. Not only does Gaven begin to show interest in Morgan, but as chance would have it he was also a good friend of the man Vallone killed. This gives Vallone two motives for murder. In due course someone gets rid of Gaven. The evidence points to a friend of Morgan and Vallone. Certain that Vallone is the real killer, Morgan goes through psychological hell after the friend is convicted of murder. Finally she tells the police everything she knows including Vallone's confession to the earlier murder. The convicted man turns out to be guilty after all, so that by informing on Vallone all that Morgan has accomplished is the destruction of her own happiness. Although *Obsession* was never released in the United States, it was reviewed by a foreign correspondent for *Variety*, who described it as "an attempt at a psycho-murder thriller replete with various ironic twists, but lack(ing) the suspense and movement necessary" for a first-rate picture. "Gallic soap opera," he called it, with a "turgid mounting," and a love affair that is "never real enough to give the film any poignance." Maybe the reviewer just didn't care for *film noir*. In any event the picture's tone and spirit don't seem alien to the Woolrich world, and perhaps someday it will surface over here.

Meanwhile back in Hollywood, anyone who expected *Rear Window*'s success to launch a new cycle of Woolrich-based features was sadly disappointed. By the mid-1950s competition from television had left the movie business dead on its feet and most of Woolrich's media money was coming from the sale of TV rights to his stories and novelettes. The only American theatrical film based on Woolrich after *Rear Window* was *Nightmare* (United Artists, 1956), a remake of the 1947 *Fear in the Night*, written and directed, like the original feature, by Maxwell Shane. The story line, taken from Woolrich's 1941 novelette "And So to Death"/"Nightmare," is the same in both pictures: a young man wakes from a dream that he committed murder in a mirrored room, finds evidence that the dream was real, seeks help from his police detective brother-in-law, and so on. The relatively generous budget permitted Shane to shoot this remake on location in New Orleans, with Edward G. Robinson as plainclothesman René Bressard and Kevin McCarthy as murder-haunted Stan Grayson. With a running time almost twenty minutes longer than that of *Fear in the Night*, Shane introduced a new plot element (Grayson lurching through the French Quarter on the track of a weird tune he heard in his nightmare), plus several jazz and blues numbers, and a long scene between Grayson and a bar girl that has no connection with the story. The eighty-nine-minute picture was completed in December 1955 and released the following May. Featured in the cast were Connie Russell, Virginia Christine, Rhys Williams, Gage Clarke (as the Svengaliesque villain), Barry Atwater and Marian Carr. Critical reception was indifferent but *noir* specialist Bob Porfirio rates the film highly, singling out for praise its expressionistic visuals "from the opening credits done in wax over McCarthy's eyes illuminated by candle," its "inventive jazz score" by Herschel Burke Gilbert, the evocative first-person narration, and "the exotic bayous and strange nocturnal odyssey down Bourbon Street. . . ." All true enough, but Robinson looks too old for the part of the detective and performs stodgily, without the necessary sadistic edge, while the bluesy score doesn't mesh well with the *noir* ambience and story line. For my money *Fear in the Night* is much the better version.

Next in the parade of movies taken from Woolrich sources came a picture made in France and apparently never shown in the United States. *Escapade* (Pathé, 1957) was directed by the little-known Ralph Habib and loosely adapted from Woolrich's 1940 "Cinderella and the Mob," a pulp comedy-of-errors in which a sixteen-year-old high school girl finds herself mistaken by gangsters for a young-looking gun moll and enlisted in a scheme to rub out another mobster who ran off with the loot. This feeble story was blown up to feature length and transposed from mid-America to France by playwright Marcel Achard (1899–1974), one of whose stage farces brought him a measure of U.S. fame when it was adapted by Harry Kurnitz into the 1962 comedy hit and later Peter Sellers movie *A Shot in the Dark*. From a brief summary printed in the program book of Italy's 1986 International Mystery Film Festival (Mystfest) it seems that this seventy-five-minute picture kept at least the core of Woolrich's tale. Philippe (Roger Hanin), a gang leader, wants to hire a certain female criminal to help him trap another gangster, Raphael (Louis Jourdan), who has run off with mob money. By mistake he telephones Yvette (Dany Carrel), who thinks she's talking to her boyfriend, also named Philippe, and agrees to play up to this Raphael without any idea that she's leading him to his death. Eventually Raphael catches on and she confesses her real identity to him and they try to escape the gang together but, as in Woolrich's story, the good badman character dies protecting the innocent maiden. Not even the Paris correspondent for *Variety* bothered to review this one.

Between 1958 and 1963 Woolrich signed contracts for the Japanese screen rights to four of his works, receiving $225 for the 1939 novelette "Through a Dead Man's Eye," $525 for *Deadline at Dawn*, $750 for *I Married a Dead Man* and $1,500 for the 1945 story "Dipped in Blood," better known as "Fountain Pen." None of these pictures was seen outside Japan but the 1986 Mystfest program book includes a synopsis of the last of the quartet, *Ah Bakudan* (Toho, 1964), which was written and directed by Kihachi Okamoto and clearly follows at least the broad outline of Woolrich's story. The gang leader Daisaku (Yunosuke Ito) and his faithful sidekick Taro (Hideo Sunazaka) have just been released after three years in prison but find that both the mob and Daisaku's mistress have been taken over by rival gangster Yato (Ichiro Nakatani), an intellectual of sorts, whose motto is: "The pen is a culture's life." Vowing revenge, Daisaku assembles a bomb with Taro's help and inserts it into a fountain pen which he then switches with the pen Yato always carries in his jacket pocket. Chance takes a hand as in the Woolrich story and the pen bomb winds up with Daisaku's son (Tadashi Takahashi). Apparently the filmmakers added new plot elements to extend the picture to feature length, for the Mystfest synopsis mentions a later scheme to kill Yato with an exploding golf ball.

Aside from these four Japanese deals, the only income Woolrich made from the movies during the last ten years of his life came from options on various novels and stories. His financial records show no payment at all for the last English-language feature based on his work to be released in his lifetime, which was also one of the silliest and most remote from his spirit. *The Boy Cried Murder* (Universal, 1966) was an independently produced British quickie, directed by George Breakston (1920–1973) from a screenplay by Robin Estridge, the author of some well-received intrigue novels under the pseudonym of Philip Loraine. The eighty-six-minute picture was made possible by the production company's purchase from RKO of the unexercised remake option on that studio's 1949 classic *The Window*. But in the sixties version all that remains of Woolrich's excellent 1947 source novelette is the basic premise of a boy who witnesses a murder but is believed by no one except the killer. The Breakston-Estridge adaptation is set on a passenger steamer and in an Adriatic resort village. When a traveler falls off the ship, a whining English lad named Jonathan (Fraser "Fizz" Macintosh) claims he saw someone push the man overboard. Rescued, the man insists he wasn't pushed at all but fell off the deck after drinking too much. Jonathan's mother and stepfather (Veronica Hurst and Phil Brown) punish the boy for his lie. At the resort village the parents strike up a friendship with another couple, Suzy and Mike (Beba Loncar and Tim Barrett). Later another woman enters the picture, one whom Mike had wronged before the film began. Jonathan happens to witness Mike's murder of this woman, but when he reports what he saw and no corpse is found, his tale is dismissed as one more lie—except by Mike. When his parents go to a dance one evening, they lock Jonathan in his room. Mike comes to kill the boy. Jonathan escapes and Mike chases him all over the sort community, finally cornering him in a citadel overlooking the driatic. Meanwhile Jonathan's parents have discovered he's missing nd start the police hunting for him. The cliffhanger climax takes lace on a ledge above the sea and ends pretty much as expected. Such eviews as the picture garnered ran the gamut from mediocre to dreadful.

That same year saw the release of the only known Russian film ased on Woolrich material. *Srok Istekaet na Rassvete* (Gruziafilm, 966) was a ninety-one-minute version of *Deadline at Dawn,* starring driadna Chenguelaya as Bricky Koelmann and Merabe Tavadze as ony Williams. The American names of the characters suggest that the writer-director team of Nelli Nenova and Gennadi Pulaja may have tried to re-create Woolrich's *noir* New York in the wilds of the Soviet Republic of Georgia where the film was shot. Since at the time there were no copyright relations between the United States and the U.S.S.R., Woolrich was paid nothing and probably never knew the picture existed. Not even a plot summary is available for this film.

In the spring of 1967 Japan's Daiei studio paid Woolrich $960 for the right to make a new version of *The Black Angel* and distribute it in Japan for five years. *Yoru No Wana* (Daiei, 1967), directed by Sokichi Tomimoto from a screenplay by Kazuro Funabashi more or less based on Woolrich's classic 1945 novel, does seem to touch base with its source—more so indeed than the memorable American version of 1946—if we judge by the Mystfest program book's synopsis. The protagonist, Aiko (Ayako Wakao), discovers that her husband has a mistress named Asami (Michiko Hikari) and goes to visit her rival's apartment. No one is home but she goes in anyway. The telephone rings: it's Aiko's husband on the other end. Then Aiko sees the dead body of Asami. She flees, taking with her the dead woman's address book which includes the name of Aiko's husband. That evening the husband comes home, accompanied by a policeman. Aiko is questioned but is convinced that her husband wouldn't have made the phone call to Asami if he had previously killed her and so, forgetting her jealousy, she defends him fiercely. To clear him she decides to seek out the real murderer and begins telephoning the people listed in Asami's address book. In due course she finds herself menaced, but how closely the rest of the film follows Woolrich is anyone's guess.

As of the wretched last year of Woolrich's life, only three of his major suspense novels—*The Bride Wore Black, Waltz into Darkness* and *Rendezvous in Black*—hadn't been made into Hollywood features. But producer-director Hall Bartlett (b.1922) had fallen in love with *The Bride,* and from the mid-1950s until the middle sixties he had paid Woolrich $1,000 a year for an option on the movie rights. A $4,500 lump-sum payment in 1965 left Bartlett the owner of all screen rights in the novel. Unable to secure his own financing for the picture, Bartlett sold his interest to Les Films du Carrosse, the productio company of the finest French director of his generation, Franço Truffaut (1932–1984), to whom it fell to make the last Woolrich-base picture released in the author's lifetime—and one of the mo fascinating. In *La Mariée Etait en Noir* (Les Films du Carrosse/Le Productions Artistes Associés/Dino de Laurentiis S.P.A., 1968; U.S title *The Bride Wore Black*), directed by Truffaut from an adaptation o Woolrich's 1940 novel by himself and Jean-Louis Richard, Jeann Moreau starred as Julie. It was an all but inevitable choice, for in h 1961 classic *Jules et Jim* Truffaut had also cast Moreau as a unknowable man-destroying woman of the most sympathetic sor The five men who are Moreau's prey were portrayed by Miche Bouquet, Charles Denner, Claude Rich, Daniel Boulanger and Miche Lonsdale, with Jean-Claude Brialy as the friend of the first victim. Th one-hundred-seven-minute film was photographed by the outstandin cinematographer Raoul Coutard, and the music score was by Alfre Hitchcock's favorite composer, Bernard Herrmann.

Reviews were ecstatic. Every one of Moreau's victims, said Renat Adler of the *New York Times*, "is a gem of characterization, lines witt and right, acting subtle and thought out, the decor of their lives an even the manner of their deaths inventive and expressive of personality." What almost no one bothered to point out was that Truffaut ha pulled off one of the neatest feats in the history of cinemati adaptations of novels. He moved the action to France and Switzerland, junked the character of Wanger and the detective element scrapped almost everything in Part Five of Woolrich's novel includin the wild coincidences revealed at its climax, and yet kept true to th spirit and structure of much of the book. Truffaut even found room fo a number of tiny details from the novel, filming the bit where th maid adds water to Michel Bouquet's gin bottle, for example, an changing most of the victims' names either not at all or just enough t make them pronounceable in French, so that Ferguson (Charle Denner) becomes Fergus, with the accent on the second syllable as i Camus. But since his own view of the world was not bleak but life-loving and optimistic in the tradition of his mentor Jean Renoir Truffaut dropped the corkscrew twists and dark metaphysics of Woolrich's novel and used characterization, camerawork, color, music and nuance rather than Woolrich's plot manipulations to show us that by her fanatical crusade Julie has destroyed herself.

In his critical study *The Cinema of François Truffaut* (1970), Graham Petrie writes eloquently of this movie's power. He describes how Truffaut obtains the effect "almost literally . . . of a *dance* in which music and camera combine, the one adapting and suiting itself to the needs of the other." His discusses the made-for-each-other relationships between the bride and her victims, with Julie "using [the men] coldly and deliberately for her own purposes" while they in turn ronically "attempt to manipulate her for their own satisfaction." He praises Truffaut for pulling our sympathies in several directions at once, so that "we find ourselves drawn into complicity with [Julie,] into sharing her sense of her victims as pure objects to be manipulated and disposed of *at the same time as* we are made uncomfortably aware of their reality and humanity. One side of us wishes her to succeed . . . while another keeps reminding us that not only are these people like ourselves who are being killed but their elimination is fanatically wrong-headed."

While researching his book on Truffaut, Petrie read *The Bride Wore Black*—and disliked it intensely. He found Woolrich's milieu and characters "uniformly unsympathetic," the language and motivation "crude and coarse," and criticized Woolrich for making "no attempt to humanise or give complexity to any of the victims" who are all "one-dimensional figures put up simply to be knocked down as ingeniously as possible. . . . The sordid and mechanical 'naturalism' of the book fails to bring any of the characters and events to life in any very challenging way, while Truffaut's romanticism and the mysterious and dreamlike atmosphere which he creates combine with his typical attention to the details of human experience to produce a work of complex and evocative beauty, for whose subtleties the original can take little credit."

Petrie sees rightly enough that the Woolrich novel is too coldly and unemotionally written for its own good but fails like most commentators to realize how much of not just the plot of the film but its essence stems from Woolrich's *Bride*, and how many of Truffaut's innovations, such as the strategies for dividing our reaction, come straight out of the Woolrich repertory. In *La Mariée Etait en Noir* Truffaut did to Woolrich source material precisely what his idol Hitchcock had done fourteen years before in *Rear Window*: kept much of the plot even to precise details but transformed it into a totally cinematic and personal work that will be seen and loved for generations to come.

What Woolrich would have thought of the movie will never be known. As we've seen, he was still alive when it opened in New York but confined to a wheelchair and unable or unwilling to make the effort to go see it even with Truffaut himself at the screening and anxious to meet him. A few months later Woolrich was dead.

By that time Truffaut was preparing if not actually shooting another film rooted in a Woolrich *roman noir* but transformed by his cinematic power and open-to-the-world humanism into an extremely personal and moving work, based this time on Woolrich's 1947 Destroying Angel novel *Waltz into Darkness*. The theme had appealed to Truffaut at least as far back as *Jules et Jim*, and what attracted him to this particular Woolrich book, he said, was that it gave him a chance to d a story about a man obsessed with and ruined by a woman in the vein of several movies he admired: Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Ange* (1930), Jean Renoir's *La Chienne* (1931), Fritz Lang's *Scarlet Stree* (1945). But Truffaut saw relations between the sexes rather differently from Woolrich, and in *La Sirène du Mississippi* (Les Films du Carrosse/ Les Productions Artistes Associés/Produzioni Associate Delphos, 1969; U.S. title *Mississippi Mermaid*) he did again what he had done in *La Mariée Etait en Noir* and what Hitchcock had done before him in *Rear Window*, keeping most of the Woolrich plot while radically altering its meaning, scrapping the grim and feverish Woolrich tone in favor of his own life-affirming optimism. The one-hundred-twenty-three-minute film was both directed and scripted by Truffaut, with photography by Deny Clerval and music by Antoine Duhamel. Jean-Paul Belmondo starred as Louis Mahé and Catherine Deneuve as Marion/ Julie, with Michel Bouquet as the private detective Comolli (Walter Downs in the novel), Nelly Borgeaud as Berthe Roussel, and Marcel Berbert as Louis's business partner Jardin.

Truffaut changed the time from the 1880s to the present and the principal setting from New Orleans to the French-owned tropical island of Reunion in the Indian Ocean. Louis Mahé (Jean-Paul Belmondo), the island's richest tobacco planter, has sent away for a mail-order bride. Almost as soon as Julie Roussel (Catherine Deneuve) steps off the boat, Louis realizes she's not the woman he sent for; but she's so adorably beautiful and sweetly mysterious that he falls in love with her anyway and marries her. Then one bright day she vanishes from the island, along with most of Louis's money. Heartbroken and vengeance-driven, he pursues her, catches up with her in the south of France, listens to her story, falls in love with her again, and commits murder to save her from the investigator he himself had put on her trail. As Vincent Canby suggested in his *New York Times* review, the picture is less a suspense thriller than an exploitation of loneliness and love. Even the opening credits, he points out, "are presented against the background of a newpaper's 'personal' ads. On the soundtrack voices are heard, first one, then another, and then a kind of chorus of controlled desperation ('Young girl, serious, pretty . . .' 'Bachelor, 35, interested in music . . .'). Everyone is searching for love."

But so was Woolrich's *Waltz into Darkness* an exploration of loneliness and love, although in a wildly different key. What distinguishes *La Sirène du Mississippi* is not the theme but the variety of ways in which Truffaut reworked that overheated and bizarre novel into his own Renoiresque design. Some of Truffaut's alterations are obvious and major, for example the conversion of Woolrich's nameless metaphysical female demon into a sensuous, fully individualized woman with a vibrant sexuality and no trace of the religious aura that surrounds her in the novel. Other Truffaut contributions are subtle and close to unnoticeable, like replacing the Woolrich woman's murder of the canary with Deneuve's mere indifference to the bird's natural death. The most radical departure from the novel comes at the film's climax: overcome by Belmondo's love, Deneuve stops slowly poisoning him, saves his life and marches off absurdly into the snow with him to start their relationship over. No one who sees this movie could mistake Truffaut for a pessimist.

The best account of the interaction between the novel and the film is that of Graham Petrie in *The Cinema of François Truffaut*. As he put it, Truffaut's

> characteristic generosity towards his people . . . leads him to soften the character of Marion and make her much less calculatingly vicious and amoral than the [woman] of the book; Marion is frivolous with a core of hardness, but much more genuinely attached to Louis throughout than her counterpart in the novel. The result is that the weakness of the novel is exactly reversed: Truffaut creates a sense of genuine love and tenderness between his characters which makes Marion's attempt to poison Louis difficult to take, while [Woolrich] presents a near-degenerate . . . who is perfectly capable of poisoning her husband but less so of repenting.

Or to phrase it another way, Truffaut took almost all the *noir* out of Woolrich's novel, substituted the full spectrum of colors—physical, psychological, emotional—and created a lovely and fascinating movie that every Woolrich enthusiast should see. Unfortunately the picture was a commercial disaster.

The first and probably most interesting of the three Woolrich-based features of the seventies was *Martha* (WDR, 1973), a one-hundred-eleven-minute picture directed by the tempestuous and prolific Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1946–1982), who also wrote the screenplay based on Woolrich's 1968 story "For the Rest of Her Life." Although made for West German television, the movie was exhibited in 1974 at the Locarno Film Festival and offered for European theatrical release. From the Mystfest program book's synopsis and the review in *Variety* it seems clear that Fassbinder kept Woolrich's skeletal structure but added a great deal of his own story material to emphasize the sadomasochism of the film's principal couple. Martha Hyer (Margit Carstensen), a thirty-year-old single woman concerned only for her own welfare, comes to Rome on a vacation trip with her father (Adrian Hoven). In the garden of the German Embassy she meets

Helmut Salomon (Karlheinz Böhm), who quickly gains a powerfu hold over her. Her father dies on the trip and she is unmoved, but sh cries when she loses her purse. Although Salomon claims to fin Martha unattractive, he marries her and then sets out to subdue an break her, for example by forcing her to have sex while she's badl sunburned. Eventually he stops paying any attention to her bu forbids her to leave their home for any reason. She happens to mee Kaiser (Peter Chatel), a former colleague of her husband's, and the sneak an affair. Salomon becomes suspicious and begins to terroriz Martha, who thinks he wants to kill her. She decides to break up wit Kaiser but at their farewell rendezvous she's so certain they're bein followed by Salomon that she causes her lover to lose control of hi car. Kaiser dies in the wreck but Martha survives, paralyzed and a Salomon's mercy. "Fassbinder," said *Variety*, "cannily uses sharp confrontations, shrewd zooms and controlled acting to keep this from falling into thriller or melodramatic traps."

A year later the only known Italian movie adapted from Woolrich material was released in Europe, but despite two world-class stars the picture was never shown in the United States and I've been unable to find a word written about it in English. The hundred-minute *La Pupa del Gangster* (CC Champion-Concordia, 1974), which is roughly translatable as *Gun Moll*, was directed by Giorgio Capitani from a screenplay by Ernesto Castaldi more or less based on Woolrich's 1939 pulper "Collared." The plot summary in the Mystfest program book which is my only source of information suggests that the filmmakers took nothing but the bare idea of the Woolrich story. Charlie Colletto (Marcello Mastroianni), boss of a prostitution ring, comes upon one of his henchmen abusing a whore. He falls instantly in love with the woman because of her resemblance to Rita Hayworth and makes her his *pupa* or moll. The part of the young woman is played by none other than Sophia Loren. But Charlie is also sleeping with a woman named Anna, whom he kills during a violent argument. He makes Loren perjure herself and give him an alibi, and eventually, tired of being oppressed, Loren sets out to work undercover helping the police convict him.

Perhaps that film is so bad that no distributor would release it in the States, but it couldn't possibly have been worse than the next American movie based on Woolrich. *Union City* (Kinesis Ltd., 1979) was a dirt-cheap independent production, directed by Mark Reichert from his own screenplay adapted from Woolrich's 1937 story "The Corpse Next Door." For no reason except that generic urban backdrops and fifties props and costumes must have been easier to come by, Reichert moved the film's setting from Manhattan to Union City, New Jersey, and its time frame from the Depression to the McCarthy era. But he didn't bother to change Woolrich's Depression-saturated story line in which Harlan, a terrified little New Yorker, fights a duel to the death with a night-prowling stranger over a bottle of milk and stuffs the interloper's body inside a Murphy bed in a vacant apartment in his building. The suspense stemmed of course from our wondering whether, and if so how and when, the corpse would be discovered. Reichert inflated this excellent tale to feature length by throwing in a long rambling subplot in which Harlan's smoldering and sexually unfulfilled wife has an affair with the building superintendent. Deborah Harry of the rock group Blondie starred as Lillian Harlan and Dennis Lipscomb as her murderous husband. The New York reviewers thought the picture was an at least halfway decent spoof of *film noir* and of fifties pictures about sexual passion, and the combination of Harry's performance and the music score by the Blondie group's lead guitarist Chris Stein has given the movie a certain cult status. But it's a dreadful bomb, by far the most dispensable of any American picture taken from Woolrich material. Its eighty-seven minutes of running time seem to go on for hours. It's boring, pretentiously arty, ludicrously unsuspenseful, an impossible mishmash of disconnected elements, with all the production values of a backyard home movie. Avoid it at all costs.

A few years later France weighed in with the hundred-ten-minute *J'ai Epouse une Ombre* (Sara Films/T.F. 1 Films, 1982; U.S. title *I Married a Shadow*), directed by newcomer Robin Davis from a screenplay by Davis and Patrick Laurent which, like the 1950 movie *No Man of Her Own*, was adapted from Woolrich's 1948 novel *I Married A Dead Man*. Davis uses very little from the novel except its springboard situation, which he develops with French characters and locales. Hélène Georges (Nathalie Baye), pregnant and abandoned by her brutal lover Frank (Richard Bohringer), boards a train where she meets another pregnant woman, Patricia Meyrand (Véronique Genest), who is traveling to Bordeaux with her husband Bertrand to meet his wealthy wine-growing parents for the first time. The train crashes, killing both Bertrand and Patricia, but Bertrand's parents mistake Hélène for their new daughter-in-law and, for the sake of her baby, born prematurely in the wreck, she goes along with the impersonation. In due course she falls in love with Bertrand's brother Pierre (Francis Huster) and is menaced by the invasion of her old lover Frank into her new life.

Davis stresses the story's emotional side and directs superbly the scenes between his female characters, but leaves out most of the suspense and menace and every trace of the existential dread that filled Woolrich's *noir* novel. In Davis's climax, Hélène stabs Frank to death in the woods behind the Meyrand château. Then, in a scene carefully reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Psycho* but without a moment of Hitchcockian terror, Pierre helps Hélène sink the dead man's body and car. On her deathbed, Pierre's mother Léna (Madeleine Robinson) dictates a false confession, to be used in case Hélène or Pierre are ever accused of the murder. The difference between Davis's final scene, with its soft lush music and loving family embracing in the sunny vineyard, and Woolrich's fade-out with its shudder before nothingness, is precisely the difference between *allègre* and *noir*. Nathalie Baye is far better suited to the lead than was Barbara Stanwyck in *No Man of Her Own*, but well crafted and watchable though *J'ai Epouse une Ombre* is, it never rises above the mid-level of Woolrich-based films.

As of this writing the latest movie of Woolrichian origin is a high-tech chase thriller related to its source only in the most tenuous sense. *Cloak & Dagger* (Universal, 1984), directed by Australian Richard Franklin (b.1948), stars Henry Thomas as a pint-sized aficionado of video games who apparently witnesses the murder of an FBI agent in the mirrored outer wall of a San Antonio skyscraper but can't convince anyone that he's being hunted by enemy spies. Dabney Coleman co-stars in the dual role of the boy's father and the fantasy superhero Thomas has conjured up out of his juvenile imagination.

Universal Pictures had paid the Woolrich estate $7,500 for the right to remake RKO's 1949 classic *The Window*, which had been closely based on Woolrich's 1947 novelette "The Boy Cried Murder." The original plan was to shoot *Cloak & Dagger* as a straightforward update of the earlier film, but Richard Franklin wasn't attuned to the paranoid Woolrich world which Ted Tetzlaff had captured in that first movie. The trouble with *The Window*, Franklin argued, was that it "never established why no one will help the little boy, who seemed quite a nice kid. On the other hand, in a more traditional boy-who-cried-wolf story, one would have had to establish the boy's lack of credibility, and that would have been sort of dull filmmaking." While wrestling with this problem, Franklin met Henry Thomas for the first time, "and found him playing Dungeons and Dragons. His mother said something that just sort of solved everything. 'You know,' she said, 'Henry's so into these games that sometimes we don't know when he's talking about reality and when he's talking about a game he's playing.' 'Well, my God,' I thought, 'there's the way to get around the basic problem of the story.'" Franklin and screenwriter Tom Holland simply turned the whole film into a sort of live-action video game being played in the boy's mind, stringing one fake Hitchcock chase scene after another in a context that rules any question of credibility out of court. The picture is so little connected with Woolrich that his name only appears on screen in the fine print of the tail credits.

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As of this writing, the story of the movies based on Woolrich ends here. But his influence on Hollywood has taken other forms as well, and it would take a separate book (which I do not plan to write) to cover that subject completely. One long chapter of any such volume would have to deal with the many pictures whose core concepts seem to have been borrowed from the Woolrich canon without attribution. That chapter would begin (assuming the author believed *Blues of a Lifetime*) with the movie supposedly based on the junked *I Love You, Paris*, and would have to dredge up atrocious B flicks like the Bela Lugosi screamer *Scared to Death* (Golden Gate, 1947), whose corpse-as-narrator gimmick is an obvious rip-off from "If the Dead Could Talk," as well as somewhat more respectable low-budget pictures like *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors* (Paramount, 1964), whose voodoo episode is suspiciously similar to "Dark Melody of Madness"/"Papa Benjamin." Another chapter, even longer and necessarily more speculative in nature, would need to explore Woolrich's enormous indirect influence on *film noir*. How many of the genre's distinctive story motifs and visual images can be seen as translations or extensions of the Woolrich sensibility into another medium? Would psychotic cops have existed in such movies if Woolrich had never written Noir Cop stories and if Steve Fisher had not modeled his police sociopath in *I Wake Up Screaming* on Woolrich himself? Why do so many *films noirs* from *Detour* (PRC, 1945) and *D.O.A.* (United Artists, 1950) through the recent *Black Widow* (20th Century-Fox, 1987) seem much closer to the Woolrich spirit than most of the pictures overtly based on his work? I will leave such theoretical ventures to writers more qualified than myself and move on to consider Woolrich's interaction with another of the media which have shaped his time and our own.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Woolrich's first exposure on radio came, as we've seen, in 1940 when an adaptation of his 1936 classic "The Night Reveals" was introduced to the listening audience by Rex Stout and broadcast on the short-lived *Tonight's Best Story* series over an independent New York station. But it was only after Paramount Pictures' 1942 release of *Street of Chance*, the first major Hollywood movie based on Woolrich's suspense fiction, that the adaptability of not one but dozens of his works was discovered by radio's entrepreneurs. He wasn't paid a cent by *Tonight's Best Story* but his financial records show radio income of $1,285 in 1943, $2,850 in 1944, $3,120 in 1945, $6,872.50 in 1946, $4,241 in 1947, $3,600 in 1948, $4,000 in 1949—when averaged together, enough to live on in modest comfort during those years. At the start of the fifties his money from that medium dwindled as its golden age came to an end. But by then the various dramatic series that specialized in crime and suspense had broadcast dozens of plays based on his novels and stories, including several that rank with the finest adaptations of Woolrich in any medium.

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It was fitting that Woolrich was introduced to a national radio audience by the series that, more than any other, epitomized the best in the medium's crime dramas: *Suspense*. That classic anthology of shudders and thrills was broadcast over the CBS network from June 1942 until September 1962. Each of the men who at different times were in charge of the series had his own favorite writers whose stories he liked to use on the program. For William Spier (1907–1973), the first producer-director to leave his mark on *Suspense*, the ideal writer was Woolrich.

The fit between the kind of story Woolrich wrote and the kind of radio drama Spier wanted on the air was near perfect. "*Suspense*," writes media historian John Dunning, "dealt in life-or-death situations. That element was usually established within the first few minutes. Then, through characterization and audio coloring, little touches were added to heighten the sensation of impending doom. That was what suspense was all about: the slow tightening of the knot." Or, in the words of the series host, The Man in Black (Joseph Kearns), describing what listeners should expect:

> The thrill of the nighttime. The hushed voice and the prowling step. The crime that is almost committed. The finger of suspicion, pointing perhaps at the wrong man. The stir of nerves at the ticking of the clock. The rescue that might be too late, or the murderer who might get away. . . . Mystery and intrigue and dangerous adventure. . . .

Spier's job was to live up to those promises week after week, and to help him he put together a superb team of collaborators including director Ted Bliss, sound effects expert Berne Surrey, composers Lucien Moraweck and Lud Gluskin, conductor Bernard Herrmann, and well-known mystery writers like John Dickson Carr and Woolrich. Between 1943 and 1950 a total of thirty-one *Suspense* episodes (counting reruns) were adapted from Woolrich novels or stories, and the best of these are among the finest radio dramas ever broadcast, a kind of *film noir* without images—except of course those in the listeners' imaginations, which are perhaps the most powerful images of all.

Just short of nine months after its debut, *Suspense* aired its first Woolrich-based drama, "The Night Reveals" (March 2, 1943), whose source was the same 1936 tale that had been heard in another version on *Tonight's Best Story* three years earlier. As Woolrich had written it, "The Night Reveals" was a superb slice of terror-in-the-everyday, confronting insurance adjuster Harry Jordan with mounting circumstantial evidence of his wife's compulsive pyromania. As adapted for *Suspense* by radio writer Sigmund Miller, this oscillation thriller was radically watered down: Jordan narrates the play in first person, and at the climax, which is wildly at odds with that of Woolrich's story, he is himself denounced by his wife as the firebug in the family, and we learn that his first-person narration has all along been a confession to the police. Ted Bliss directed Fredric March in a fine low-key performance as Jordan, in which even Miller's closing monologue is underplayed to the hilt:

> You can't blame anybody for liking fires. It's not their fault. Fires are beautiful to watch. So bright and clean. They burn up all the filth and dirt. They're magnificent to watch. Especially the big ones. The way the flames roar and crackle. Lighting up everything around you. The beautiful fires. The beautiful fires. . . .

Though lacking the power and tragedy of Woolrich's story, the radio drama was well above average in excitement, and proved so popular that it was repeated three more times on *Suspense* before the decade ended.

Three and a half months later the series presented "Last Night" (June 15, 1943), which was based on Woolrich's 1940 novelette "The Red Tide" but in an adaptation—perhaps by Woolrich himself, for no other writer is credited—that, like Sigmund Miller's version of "The Night Reveals," greatly revised and softened the story for the mass audience. Both the radio play and the original novelette were oscillation thrillers about Jacqueline Blaine's rising and falling suspicion that her husband Gil has killed their wealthy guest and stolen his bankroll. In the 1940 novelette Gil was in fact guilty but in the radio drama he only looks guilty and the real murderer is someone else. Kent Smith and Margo (who had recently played Clo-Clo in RKO's *The Leopard Man*) starred as the Blaines, and Ted Bliss again directed. Whether or not Woolrich wrote the *Suspense* script himself, he seems to have fallen in love with the changes in the radio version, for that same year, when he revised "The Red Tide" for inclusion in his first story collection, *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*, he took over both the radio play's title and its toned-down though still quite suspenseful plot.

"The White Rose Murders" (July 6, 1943) was based on "The Death Rose," a powerful if uneven thriller first published in a pulp magazine earlier that year but for some reason never included in an anthology or collection and therefore little known today. The protagonist in both the story and the radio drama is wealthy Ginny Trowbridge, who is in love with a working-class plainclothesman and tries to save his police career by meddling in his case and staking herself out as bait to trap a serial killer of women who leaves a white rose in the hand of each of his victims. The radio version, directed by Ted Bliss and with Maureen O'Hara as Ginny, is one of the most tautly agonizing of all the Woolrich-based *Suspense* episodes. Unlike the magazine tale, the radio drama opens with an evocation, from the omniscient point of view, of the murderer at work.

> He stood there waiting. He knew that presently they would come out of the second-rate dance hall, out into the dimly lit street. He listened awhile, and smiled as the orchestra played *that tune* inside. And then they came out, the two girls. And still he waited. . . .
>
> In the narrow alley that divided the dance hall from an ugly office building, he stood smiling. Just a little inside the alley, he stood stiffly against the wall, his head back, eyes closed, arms straight down, and in his left hand—a white rose. . . .
>
> The girl is dead. Tenderly the figure straightens her hair, and gently places the limp body on the ground. Then he opens her clenched fist, and carefully, so that the thorns will not bruise her flesh, he places in her hand the white rosebud.

If the radio play was not written by Woolrich—and, as with "Last Night," no other writer is credited—then its author's ability to capture the Woolrich mood and feel is nothing short of miraculous. Not only is "The White Rose Murders" better constructed than the magazine tale, but with its *noir* implication that the world is full of lonely and twisted men who are ready, willing and able to kill women, it's much more disturbing.

The next *Suspense* adaptation of Woolrich was something of a comedown. As recast by radio writer Robert L. Richards, "The Singing Walls" (September 2, 1943) was a loose and less than nerve-wracking version of Woolrich's 1940 novelette "C-Jag," better known as "Cocaine," and later the basis of Monogram's low-budget 1947 movie *Fall Guy*. The Woolrich original, as we've seen, was one of those Living Nightmare tales in which the protagonist comes out of a blackout, caused by amnesia or drugs or hypnosis or whatever, with the ghastly sensation that he committed a murder while out of himself, and then finds on his body objective evidence of the crime he imagined and goes running through the nightscape in a frantic quest to find out if he's innocent or guilty. The Richards adaptation keeps the bare bones of Woolrich's story but eliminates much of the anguish and most of the physical action at the climax, not to mention the cocaine aspects of the plot, for which Richards substituted a few Mickey Finns. Dane Clark starred as Tommy Cochrane, the young man on the run, and Preston Foster as his cop brother-in-law Denny Sullivan. Ted Bliss once again directed.

The following month William Spier both produced and directed "After-Dinner Story" (October 26, 1943), adapted by Richards from Woolrich's 1938 tale of the same name. Otto Kruger starred as the vengeful Hardecker, who, convinced that his son's apparent suicide while trapped in an elevator with four other men was actually a case of murder, invites the survivors of the incident to his home for a deadly dinner party and a round of psychological torture. Like Woolrich himself, Spier and Richards wanted to leave it to us to decide whether the protagonist is a heroic avenger or a madman, but Kruger's icily controlled performance doesn't really give us an option.

Fine as some of these earlier episodes were, my choice for the best Woolrich-based radio drama of all time is "The Black Curtain" (December 2, 1943), whose source was Woolrich's powerful but badly flawed 1941 novel of the same name. The book had begun with the restoration of Frank Townsend's memory after three and a half years' amnesia by a second blow on the head and had followed him through the discovery that a phantom from his interim identity is after him and through his obsession to know who and what he was in the lost years. *The Black Curtain* was surely one of the best suspense novels ever written on the amnesia theme but, as we've seen, its climactic chapters were a disaster, and the 1942 movie version, *Street of Chance*, had vastly improved on the book by making the murderer not an insignificant character as Woolrich had but instead fixing the guilt on Ruth (Claire Trevor), the woman who loved the protagonist in his alter ego. The thirty-minute *Suspense* version, produced and directed by William Spier, is even better than the movie in its evocation of the bleak Woolrich world and in its climax: it's still Ruth who killed Diedrich, but her motivation is not greed as in the film but self-defense against attempted rape, and instead of being shot accidentally as in the film she shoots herself in front of Townsend after making sure he'll be cleared of the murder. Cary Grant gave a magnificent performance as Townsend and Lurene Tuttle was superb as Ruth in this play which was at once so different from its source novel and so true to its dark spirit that I'm almost convinced it was adapted by Woolrich himself. Grant's exit lines come close to summing up the essence of *noir*.

> I tried to put it all behind me, to resume my life where it left off over three years ago. Sometimes when it gets towards evening I go along Tillary Street. Once in a while somebody, somebody I don't know, will say: "Hello, Danny." And I just say hello and walk on. I don't want to find out anything anymore. I want it all to die away and be still.

> And it will. All except Ruth. *Because somewhere behind that black curtain I was loved, and loved someone*! We must have known a love I'll never know again.

The following week *Suspense* reran its first Woolrich-based drama, The Night Reveals" (December 9, 1943), with the same Sigmund Miller script but different actors. This time Robert Young played the pyromaniac Jordan, and Margo, the female lead from *The Leopard Man* movie and "Last Night," was cast as Jordan's wife. With William Spier directing, Young let out all the stops and delivered the final monologue in a wild maniacal style at the opposite end of the histrionic spectrum from Fredric March's reading for Ted Bliss earlier in the year.

Five weeks later Spier produced and directed "Dime a Dance" (January 13, 1944), based on Woolrich's classic 1938 story of the same name. There are certain family resemblances between this tale and the subsequent Woolrich thriller that *Suspense* had adapted as "The White Rose Murders": in the 1938 heart-stopper, taxi dancer Ginger Allen stakes herself out as bait to catch the sociopath who's been murdering dime-a-dance women (including Ginger's best buddy) and dancing with their corpses to the strains of "Poor Butterfly." The uncredited radio writer reduced Woolrich's memorable female protagonist to a stick figure, but the extra plot twists he added to the story to punch up the excitement and add a surprise climax are not at all alien to the Woolrich spirit. Starring as Ginger was Lucille Ball.

It was almost eight months before *Suspense* broadcast another episode based on Woolrich, but that one was the finest of the year's radio dramas derived from Woolrich material. "The Black Path of Fear" (August 31, 1944), produced and directed by Spier, was an excellent rendition of the recently published Woolrich novel of the same name. Brian Donlevy starred as Bill Scott, who has run away to Havana with an American gangster's wife but is followed by the vengeful husband, who kills the woman and frames her lover, leaving him a stranger in a strange land, menaced on all sides and fighting for his life. By eliminating the lengthy flashbacks and the interminable pulpy climax with its dope dens and sinister Orientals and secret passages and hair's-breadth escapes, the uncredited adapter—Woolrich himself again?—pared away the story line to its essence and underscored the *noir* aspects which were the novel's greatest strength.

That adapter should have given lessons to whoever scripted the next Woolrich-based *Suspense* episode. "You'll Never See Me Again" (September 14, 1944) came from Woolrich's gripping 1939 novelette of the same name in which a newlywed has a silly argument with her husband, walks out of the marriage to go home to her mother and stepfather, and apparently vanishes into thin air along the way.

Woolrich evoked the tension and anguish magnificently as the frantic Ed Bliss races against time to find his wife and convince the skeptical police that he hasn't already murdered her himself. The tension and anguish in the radio version are nil, thanks to an idiotic script which juggles the elements of Woolrich's plot so that Bliss turns out to be the bad guy. Joseph Cotten came across throughout his entire performance, not just at the end, as an unsympathetic lout.

Five weeks later *Suspense* aired yet another silly rewrite of first-rate Woolrich material. As adapted by Robert L. Richards, "Eve" (October 19, 1944) took nothing from its nominal source, Woolrich's great novel *The Black Angel*, except the general framework of a wife's race against the clock to save her husband from the electric chair by proving that his girlfriend was murdered not by him but by some other man in her life. Like the haunted angel in Woolrich's novel, Eve Jeremy assumes a new identity and invades the life of the man she suspects; unlike Woolrich's protagonist, when Eve learns that the dashing and handsome Jerry Jordan is even wealthier than her movie-producer husband, she turns off the hidden tape recorder in her apartment and decides to let the executioner make her a widow while she runs off with Jerry to Mexico City. All ends well as the misogynistic police lieutenant shows up in the nick of time and retrieves a second bugging device of his own which indeed recorded Jerry's confession. Nancy Kelly played the title role. Although this episode doesn't seem to exist on tape, an adaptation of the script into short-story form by Roby Wentz was published in the December 1946 issue of *Suspense Mystery Magazine*, a short-lived offshoot of the radio series. The story is wretchedly written ("Eve raised her large childlike blue eyes from the floor and looked at him"), but at least it preserves for posterity the ridiculous alterations this episode made in one of Woolrich's strongest novels.

The following month *Suspense* recycled one of the previous year's weakest Woolrich-based dramas and also the best in the history of the series. The repeat of "The Singing Walls" (November 2, 1944) starred Van Johnson in the original Dane Clark role, and in the rerun of "The Black Curtain" (November 30, 1944) Cary Grant reenacted, though with a shade less intensity than the first time, the part of Woolrich's amnesic protagonist.

Almost ten months later, and just a few weeks after the end of World War II, another Woolrich tale was adapted for *Suspense*, but with mixed results. "Library Book" (September 20, 1945) was based on Woolrich's 1939 novelette "The Book That Squealed," a tale which begins with pure detection and segues into action-suspense as prim librarian Prudence Roberts investigates the mutilation of a library book and stumbles into a kidnapping plot and romance with a gruff cop. The uncredited radio adaptation eliminated much of the detection and all of the tension, turning a basically serious Woolrich story into a forgettable comedy redeemed by a few bright moments (like the incident where a boy checks out of the library an armful of Tarzan novels plus a copy of Eugene O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, which he thinks will help him make a walkie-talkie). Myrna Loy starred as Prudence.

The year's second and final Woolrich-based episode was the much better "I Won't Take a Minute" (December 6, 1945), produced and directed by William Spier. The basis of the drama was Woolrich's classic 1940 annihilation thriller "Finger of Doom," in which a young man picks up his girlfriend at the end of the workday, waits for her outside a brownstone where she says her boss has asked her to drop off a package, and waits, and waits, until it becomes clear that not only has she vanished, she's vanished so completely that everyone who supposedly knew her swears she never existed. The uncredited script stays quite faithful to Woolrich's story, although the denouement is updated so that instead of pre–Pearl Harbor spies, the perpetrators turn out to be in a plot to create a new identity for a female Nazi war criminal. The only flaw in the drama is that Lee Bowman's performance is too suave and controlled for the protagonist's *noir* predicament.

In the first full year of peace, *Suspense* aired a total of five dramas taken from Woolrich, but only two of these were new to the air. "The Black Path of Fear" (March 7, 1946) recycled the excellent 1944 radio adaptation of Woolrich's novel, with its *noir* qualities intensified thanks to Cary Grant's replacing Brian Donlevy in the lead. Grant's suavity and almost-too-perfect good looks may have ruled him out as a protagonist of *noir* movies, but his performance here and in "The Black Curtain" proved that for *radio noir* he was ideal.

Perhaps the weakest of all *Suspense*'s Woolrich-based plays was "Post Mortem" (April 4, 1946), based on Woolrich's 1940 tale of the same name about a recently remarried widow who discovers that a winning lottery ticket was hidden in the pocket of her first husband's burial suit. As Woolrich wrote it, the story was an uncomfortable mix of serious and grotesquely comic elements, but it wasn't improved by the *Suspense* adapter's decision to play the whole show for laughs. Agnes Moorehead starred.

Two weeks later the series broadcast its third rendition of "The Night Reveals" (April 18, 1946), produced and directed as usual by Spier, with Keenan Wynn and Cathy Lewis as the pyromaniac Jordan and his long-suffering wife. Wynn gave by far the most lackluster performance of the three actors who starred in this drama over the years.

Late that summer came another recycled effort, "You'll Never See Me Again" (September 5, 1946), with Robert Young replacing the star of the 1944 original, Joseph Cotten. The silly script, however, defeated Young too.

The year's final *Suspense* drama based on Woolrich was also the best new episode derived from his work since 1945's "I Won't Take a Minute." "They Call Me Patrice" (December 12, 1946) was adapted from Woolrich's long novelette of the same name, published earlier that year, in which a desperate woman, injured in a train wreck, is wrongly identified as another woman who had died in the disaster, and grasps the chance for a new life only to find it turn into nightmare. True to the ethos of forties slick magazines, the novelette had ended happily thanks to a perfectly timed confession from a character who hadn't even been mentioned till the denouement. The radio version, produced and directed by Spier, ends on a different and darker note: Helen/Patrice shoots her blackmailing ex-husband on stage but confesses to the police when circumstantial evidence leads them to arrest the man she loves for the murder. Woolrich substituted an infinitely more *noir* conclusion when he expanded the novelette into the 1948 novel *I Married a Dead Man*. Susan Peters was excellent as the protagonist of the *Suspense* version.

During 1947 Woolrichphiles had to settle for a single *Suspense* drama rooted in the master's work. "You Take Ballistics" (March 13, 1947) was a fairly close adaptation of Woolrich's 1938 story of the same name in which the police are stymied, for a while anyway, by a murderer who willingly confesses everything about his crime except the killing itself. In Woolrich's tale the straightforward bullet-gimmicking plot is juxtaposed with casually blood-chilling police sadism, while in the radio version the official brutality, though not completely eliminated, is drastically toned down. Starring as Lieutenant Ed Harvey was Howard da Silva.

In the ten months between that play and *Suspense*'s next Woolrich-based drama, the series lost the sponsorship of Roma Wines, which went back to the first broadcast of "The Black Curtain" in December of 1943, and dropped its traditional host, The Man in Black. Then at the beginning of 1948 the series was expanded from thirty to sixty minutes, with actor Robert Montgomery (1904–1981) taking over as host. The new and longer format lasted only nineteen weeks, but four of the nineteen *Suspense* hours were based on Woolrich, and at least two of the four are classics.

As its first sixty-minute drama the series offered "The Black Curtain" (January 3, 1948) in an expanded version of its magnificent half-hour adaptation of the Woolrich novel. This time host Robert Montgomery played the amnesia-haunted Townsend, with Lurene Tuttle once again as Ruth. The cast included Cathy Lewis, Jeanette Nolan, Jack Kruschen, William Conrad and *Suspense*'s original Man in Black, Joseph Kearns. This hour-long version is set during World War

II, and some of the new story elements and characters owe more to Raymond Chandler than to Woolrich. But the uncredited adapter (assuming it wasn't Woolrich himself) recycled verbatim much of the dialogue from the thirty-minute radio drama, and caught the Woolrich tone perfectly in a great deal of the new matter, for instance in Montgomery's opening lines.

> A man is born, he lives out his little life, and he dies. This is the one real break, I guess, that every man can count on, the one thing nobody can take away from him: to be born, just once, and to die, just once. Every man, that is, except Frank Townsend. Born with two strikes on him, died with two strikes on him, and then was born again with three strikes on him. Pushed back into life that day, on that street.

Despite a bit of padding here and there, the hour-long version of "The Black Curtain" is a marvelous specimen of *film noir sans images*, and would provide excellent source material if anyone should ever remake the 1942 movie based on the Woolrich novel.

A scant three weeks later, the best of the sixty-minute Woolrich adaptations was followed by the worst. "Eve" (January 24, 1948), also referred to as "The Black Angel," was produced and directed as usual by William Spier and expanded from Robert L. Richards's 1944 *Suspense* play based on Woolrich's novel. The hour-long script was credited to Richards and someone hiding under the Sherlockian pseudonym of Sebastian Moriarty. The undynamic duo opened with a long pointless monologue about apples (apples-Eve, get it?), started their tale earlier in the chain of events that had the half-hour script, ended it both later and differently, but didn't improve the first Richards version by an iota. June Havoc played the title role, supported by Bill Johnstone, Wally Mayer, Jack Wilde, Prince Michael Romanoff (as himself), Lurene Tuttle and Jack Kruschen. With this sad misfire William Spier's long involvement with the translation of Woolrich to radio came to an end. After three more episodes he left the series.

Robert Montgomery temporarily replaced Spier as *Suspense*'s producer, and newcomer Anton M. Leader (b.1913) took over as director, but Woolrich story material was used as often as before. Early in their tenure the new team presented a powerful sixty-minute drama entitled "Nightmare" (March 13, 1948), adapted by Alfred Palker from Woolrich's 1941 novelette "And So to Death." Like the earlier "C-Jag" which had been the basis of *Suspense*'s "The Singing Walls," this Woolrich tale had to do with a man coming out of a psychological fog, finding on his person concrete evidence of the murder that until then he had thought was only a bad dream, and frantically asking his police detective brother-in-law for help. The radio version captures the story's *noir* flavor just as successfully as did the 1947 movie version, *Fear in the Night*, although the scripts are quite different in detail. Eddie Bracken starred as the Woolrich protagonist and William Conrad as his brother-in-law the cop.

By the time of the nineteenth and last of the sixty-minute *Suspense* plays, Anton Leader had become the series producer as well as director; and like the show's first hour-long offering, its last, too, was based on Woolrich. "Deadline at Dawn" (May 15, 1948), as adapted by Irving Ravetch, stayed reasonably close to Woolrich's 1944 novel and avoided all resemblance to the eccentric 1946 movie version. Helen Walker and John Beal starred as Bricky and Quinn, the young couple from Glen Falls, Iowa, who race the clock to clear themselves of a murder and catch the homeward-bound 6:00 A.M. bus out of New York. It was a workmanlike episode, emphasizing romance rather than the *noir* coloration of the novel, and doesn't rank with the series' finest Woolrich adaptations.

After "Deadline at Dawn" *Suspense* left the air for a two months' vacation, its first since the fall of 1942. It returned to CBS in the original thirty-minute format, with Tony Leader producing and directing, and under the sponsorship of Autolite spark plugs. The first new episode under this regime was aired on July 8, 1948, but the next play taken from Woolrich wasn't heard till early the following year. "If the Dead Could Talk" (January 20, 1949) was based on Woolrich's 1943 story of the same name about the fatal love triangle among two men and a woman in a circus high-wire act. Dana Andrews starred as love's loser tempted to murder. The excellent adaptation by Larry Marcus kept little of the Woolrich story except the basic situation and characters and the big-top climax, but the new material not only improved the original but caught the *noir* tone and mood so well that, unless you're thoroughly familiar with Woolrich's tale, the radio play would probably strike you as a literal rendition.

If I had to choose one short work of Woolrich for posterity to judge him by, it would be his 1938 masterpiece "Three O'Clock," in which he makes us count the seconds with Paul Stapp, bound and gagged in his own basement, unable to move or even to scream, while the time bomb he himself set but is now unable to reach ticks closer and closer to 3:00 when it will go off. As adapted by Walter Newman for *Suspense*, "Three O'Clock" (March 10, 1949) was an almost unbearably powerful drama, with Van Heflin giving a superb performance as Stapp. This is perhaps the most purely spine-freezing episode the series broadcast during the Autolite era, certainly the finest of its later efforts based on Woolrich. The episode ended with *Radio Mirror* magazine giving Leader an award that named *Suspense* the best program of its kind then on the air.

Six weeks later came a much tamer Woolrich-based play, "The Lie" (April 28, 1949). The radio version by Herb Meadow, adapted from Woolrich's inept 1937 tale of the same name, starred Mickey Rooney as college punk Martin Delevan, who finds the body of his slut stepmother and, convinced that his beloved father finally got fed up and killed her, rearranges the evidence so as to frame himself for the crime. Woolrich's story is a pale spinoff from the much stronger "The Corpse and the Kid"/"Boy with Body" (1935), which would have made a far better basis for an episode of *Suspense*.

At the end of May the series broadcast for the fourth time "The Night Reveals" (May 26, 1949) in Sigmund Miller's 1943 adaptation. Fredric March reprised the role of pyromaniac Harry Jordan, with Jeanette Nolan as his wife.

The 1949–50 season brought several personnel changes to *Suspense*: William Spier came back as producer and Norman Macdonnell took over from Tony Leader as director. Woolrich was back too, and "Momentum" (October 27, 1949), based on his stark and doom-laden 1940 story "Murder Always Gathers Momentum," was one of the better late *Suspense* dramas taken from his chillers. Radio adapter E. Jack Neuman substituted first-person narration for the objective prose of the story but lost very little of its power as a terrified protagonist, rightly or wrongly convinced that he's guilty of murder, runs headlong through the nightscape to destruction. Victor Mature and Lurene Tuttle starred as the trapped Richard and Pauline Payne.

Spier and Macdonnell were also responsible for the final *Suspense* play based on Woolrich, "Angel Face" (May 18, 1950). The spoken credits claimed that this was "an original play written for radio by Cornell Woolrich," but in fact it was an adaptation of his 1937 story "Face Work," and it's by no means certain that the adaptation was by Woolrich himself. In any event it's a decent straightforward rendition of the tale about a nightclub dancer who tries to get her kid brother out of the death house by entering the life of the gambler she thinks is guilty and enticing the truth out of him. Claire Trevor, the Ruth of the 1942 movie *Street of Chance*, played the lead. As in every Woolrich-based *Suspense* episode since the beginning, Lucien Moraweck composed and Lud Gluskin conducted the atmospheric *noir* music score for the play.

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Suspense presented more and better dramas adapted from Woolrich than any other radio series but it was far from the only program whose story editors bought air rights from that death-intoxicated man. A total of twenty-five Woolrich-based episodes (including reruns) were heard in less than five years on *Molle Mystery Theatre*, a durable if unspectacular series that debuted September 7, 1943 on NBC and bounced back and forth through changes in network, sponsorship, title and format for the rest of the decade and well into the 1950s. The Woolrich novels and stories chosen for *Molle* fell into three roughly equal categories: those that had already been adapted into radio plays for *Suspense*, those that later would be adapted for *Suspense*, and those whose only radio version was the one presented on *Molle*. Only four of the Woolrich-based *Molle* dramas survive on tape, in the form of Armed Forces Radio Service transcriptions, but three of the quartet fall into the last category.

The series's first episode derived from Woolrich seems to have been "Dreadful Memory" (November 30, 1943), although it's not clear which story it was based on. The earliest of the four surviving dramas is a thirty-minute version of "Deadline at Dawn" (January 30, 1945), which was rooted in the same Woolrich novel that was to inspire the 1946 movie and the sixty-minute *Suspense* play of 1948. Ann Loring and Larry Haines starred in this lackluster and uncompelling episode, but since the AFRS transcription cut out most of the spoken credits, it's impossible to identify the producer, director, adapter or other actors.

The much more effective "A Death Is Caused" (October 12, 1945) was adapted by J.B. Smith from Woolrich's riveting 1943 story "Mind Over Murder." No cast names are known, but the radio version captures much of the perverse power in the tale of the American woman in a tropical city who buys a hideous but nonpoisonous (or is it?) snake and plants it where it will literally terrify her ophiophobe husband to death.

A week later *Molle* presented "Leg Man" (October 19, 1945), based on Woolrich's 1943 story of a demon newshawk who becomes convinced that the police have arrested the wrong man for a barroom murder and who risks his life to grab the real killer and a promotion. It's a routine pulp action-detective piece with a dumb plot unredeemed by *noir* overtones, but the anonymous radio director, adapter and players did the best they could with this substandard material.

The last of the surviving *Molle* dramas based on Woolrich was "Two Men in a Furnished Room" (September 27, 1946), adapted by Paul Monash from the 1941 novelette "He Looked Like Murder," an oscillation thriller in which mounting evidence keeps pushing the narrator between believing and disbelieving that his roommate brutally murdered his girlfriend. In the Woolrich version an outsider is exposed at last as the killer but the friendship between the two main characters is destroyed. Monash rather cleverly reworked the plot so that the roommate under suspicion is also killed and the narrator turns out to be a double murderer. John Beal and Sam Wanamaker played the buddies.

Between 1943 and 1948 *Molle* presented a large number of other episodes adapted from Woolrich material, including "Marihuana" June 26, 1945), "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (December 14, 1945), 'Silent As the Grave" (August 9, 1946), "The Orphan Diamond" March 7, 1947), "Chance" (July 18, 1947) and "The Earring" (March 5, 1948). The series even offered a few half-hour dramas based on full-length Woolrich novels that no other radio program had adapted, such as "Black Alibi" (October 11, 1946) and, with June Havoc in the lead, "The Bride Wore Black" (February 7, 1947). None of these plays seems to have survived.

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We are luckier, however, when we come to another well-known anthology series. In the late forties the huge success of *Suspense* induced CBS to launch a companion program, *Escape*, which was produced, directed, scripted, sound-cued and acted by *Suspense* veterans, but with the emphasis on fantasy and high adventure. The series debuted on July 7, 1947 with a thirty-minute version of Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* and stayed on the air—though not continuously and most of the time without a sponsor—until the end of the summer of 1954. The tone of the program is vividly illustrated by its introduction. "Tired of the everyday grind?" the announcer (first Paul Frees, later William Conrad) would ask us. "Ever dream of a life of romantic adventure? Want to get away from it all? We offer you—*Escape*!" A drum roll would merge into the theme from Mussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain" and the announcer would continue: "*Escape*! Designed to free you from the four walls of today for a half hour of high adventure!"

Thanks to first-rate casts (though without the Hollywood stars featured on *Suspense*) and excellent background music and sound effects, *Escape* was one of the best radio dramas during those frantic years when the medium felt its first competition from TV. Of the almost two hundred episodes of the series, the vast majority were either original scripts or adaptations from the work of writers like Kipling, Joseph Conrad and H.G. Wells. Two however were based on stories by Woolrich, and fortunately both survive on tape.

"Papa Benjamin" (January 24, 1948) was produced and directed by William N. Robson, who would later take over the same jobs on *Suspense*, and was adapted by John Dunkel from Woolrich's 1935 horror classic first published as "Dark Melody of Madness." An excellent jazz-and-voodoo score by Cy Feuer helped set the mood for the story of New Orleans bandleader Eddie Block and the curse put on him by a black *papaloi* for stealing his cult's sacred chant. Frank Lovejoy starred as Block, with Luis Van Rooten as Papa Benjamin, Harry Bartell as the police commissioner and Joan Banks as Block's wife.

Fourteen months later *Escape* offered the second and last of its Woolrich adaptations, "Finger of Doom" (March 19, 1949), based on the 1940 tale of the same name which *Suspense* had presented back in 1945 as "I Won't Take a Minute." The *Escape* version, produced and directed by Norman Macdonnell and with Ivan Ditmars playing a fine background score of organ music, did an even better job than *Suspense* at dramatizing Woolrich's story of a man whose fiancée walks into a building to drop off a package and is never seen again. The radio script was by John Brussell. Harry Bartell and Ed Begley played the terrified young man and the tough cop, and the cast was rounded out by Joy Terry, Edgar Barrier, Louise Arthur, Peter Prauss and Kay Miller.

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Except for what was heard on *Suspense*, very few Woolrich-based dramas after the pair broadcast on *Escape* came across the American airwaves. NBC's *Radio City Playhouse* presented an excellent adaptation entitled "Wardrobe Trunk" (April 4, 1949), based on Woolrich's 1936 chiller "Dilemma of the Dead Lady." The protagonist suffers the tortures of the damned after stuffing the body of the woman he killed on an ocean liner into the titular trunk and we, the listening audience, go through hell with him. The short-lived ABC series *Presenting Boris Karloff* offered dramas based on the Woolrich classics "Three O'Clock" (November 30, 1949) and "The Night Reveals" (December 13, 1949). Mutual's *Murder by Experts* recycled *Molle*'s thirty-minute version of "Nightmare" (February 19, 1951), adapted from Woolrich's 1941 novelette "And So to Death." And the same network's *Nightmare* series a few years later gave us Peter Lorre as the child-murderer in the last American radio play taken from Woolrich, "If I Should Die Before I Wake" (August 25, 1954), which was based on his 1937 tale of the same name. By then Woolrich's radio income had dwindled to almost nothing, but he was making so much from licensing TV adaptations that he could hardly have cared.

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In the years before the rise of original softcover fiction, sixty-minute radio versions of current movies were as common as paperback tie-in novelizations today. At least five of these hour-long "movies on radio" and at least one that ran a modest thirty minutes were aired during the 1940s; and though not much of the Woolrich spirit seems to have survived in these plays, it's unfortunate that more of them don't exist on tape.

The first radio series to dramatize a Woolrich-based movie was the and pioneer of this genre, *Lux Radio Theatre*. The program had ebuted on NBC in October 1934, moved to CBS in July 1935, and egan presenting nothing but audio versions of movies the following ear. For most of the first half of its twenty-year run the series was osted by Cecil B. DeMille, and it was the legendary C.B. who ntroduced the *Lux* version of "Phantom Lady" (March 27, 1944), ased on the Universal film which in turn was based on Woolrich's 1942 novel. Ella Raines and Alan Curtis reprised their roles from the ovie, with Brian Aherne taking over the Franchot Tone part of the ad killer.

Less than six months later, another anthology series offered a ecessarily much different version of the same movie, based on the ame Woolrich novel, on the same CBS network. *Screen Guild Theatre* iffered from *Lux* in that its adaptations were only a half-hour long nd its Hollywood guest stars donated their salaries to the Motion icture Relief Fund. Since 1942 the series had been heard on Monday venings and sponsored by Lady Esther cosmetics. The scriptwriters nd producer-director Bill Lawrence deserve a belated moment of our ity, for they had to watch dozens of current movies each week and hen figure out ways to cut them down to twenty-two minutes of air ime without benefit of visuals. One of the pictures they saw in 1944 was *Phantom Lady*, and the *Screen Guild* adaptation was broadcast on September 11 of that year, with Ralph Bellamy and Louise Allbritton in the Franchot Tone and Ella Raines roles from the movie. In 1950 the *Screen Guild* series moved to ABC and was expanded to a sixty-minute format, but went off the air a year later.

After a bitter dispute with the radio performers' union, Cecil B. DeMille left the *Lux* show early in 1945. Late that year, veteran Warner Brothers movie director William Keighley became the series's regular host, and about six months into his stint, Keighley introduced "Deadline at Dawn" (May 20, 1946), which survives on tape. Joan Blondell played the Susan Hayward part, with Paul Lukas and Bill Williams in their movie roles as the philosophic cabbie and the naive sailor. The radio version closely followed RKO's movie, which had had but the vaguest resemblance to Woolrich's 1944 novel.

During the hot months of 1946, the ABC network launched *Hour of Mystery*, a short-lived summer replacement series sponsored by U.S. Steel. A few of the program's thirteen episodes were adapted from unfilmed novels—for example, a version of Erle Stanley Gardner's *The Case of the Lame Canary* with Victor Jory as Perry Mason, and a dramatization of one of Gardner's earliest books under the A.A. Fair pseudonym, *Turn On the Heat*, with Frank Sinatra as Donald Lam—but most were taken from novels that had fairly recently been made into movies. Two plays of the latter sort came ultimately from

Woolrich. "The Black Angel" (June 16, 1946) starred Geraldine Fitzgerald in an adaptation of the then current Universal picture based on Woolrich's 1943 novel. And "Phantom Lady" (August 18, 1946), based on Universal's 1944 movie which had previously been brought to radio on the *Lux* and *Screen Guild* programs, starred Franchot Tone in a reprise of his film role, with Roger Pryor in the part of the condemned man portrayed by Alan Curtis on the screen.

Less than three months later the short-lived CBS series *This Is Hollywood* presented "The Chase" (November 9, 1946), based on the bizarre *film noir* of the same name, which had been very loosely adapted from Woolrich's 1944 novel *The Black Path of Fear*. Michele Morgan repeated her movie role, with Robert Montgomery filling in for the picture's male star, Robert Cummings.

The last known radio version of a Woolrich-based movie was heard early in the life of *Screen Directors' Playhouse*, a series which managed to survive on NBC for almost three years at the end of the medium's golden age despite countless changes in sponsorship status, time slot and format. "Night Has a Thousand Eyes" (February 27, 1949) brought back Edward G. Robinson and William Demarest in their roles as John Triton and Lt. Shawn from the movie of the same name and the previous year. The radio version was just as far removed from Woolrich's haunting 1945 source novel as the film had been, but scriptwriter Milton Geiger did a workmanlike job of boiling the picture down to thirty minutes' air time. The host for the episode was John Farrow, who had directed the movie.

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Even after dramatic radio became extinct in the United States, Woolrich continued to make pocket money by licensing radio adaptations of his fiction in foreign countries. In 1958, for example, he was paid $83.23 in royalties from a version of his 1948 novel *I Married A Dead Man* that was broadcast in France, Belgium and Switzerland. In 1960 he received $209.17 for French radio plays taken from his 1942 novel *Phantom Lady* and his 1943 novelette "Mind over Murder"/"A Death Is Caused." In 1961 the French sent him checks totaling $664.42 for dramas based on an unspecified number of his tales. His radio royalties for 1963 amounted to $204.30, of which $58.26 was for a French play based on his 1936 thriller "The Night I Died" and $146.04 was for a rerun of an earlier French radio drama taken from *The Bride Wore Black*. The same play was repeated in France yet again in 1964, netting Woolrich an additional $53.05. Apparently he made no more radio sales anywhere in the world after that year.

The radio drama of the forties is dead, but technology has given birth to something at least marginally similar which can be found in most well-stocked bookstores today: an assortment of audio-cassettes on which works of fiction are read by well-known actors. Woolrich has begun to penetrate this medium too, and for a few dollars one can purchase Keir Dullea reading condensed versions of the classics "Rear Window" and "Three O'Clock." Dozens of other Woolrich tales may be given new aural life if the Dullea cassette is a success. But anyone in he future who adapts Woolrich either to this new form of dramatic radio or to the traditional type of radio drama will have to do very good work indeed if they are to compete in our memories with the best Woolrich-based episodes from radio's golden age.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

The story of Woolrich's interaction with television begins in that prehistoric period when the networks were in their infancy and precious few Americans even owned sets. Woolrich's financial records show that he received $60 in 1945 and $75 in 1946 for licensing teleplay adaptations of two of his short stories. Which company paid him, what stories were broadcast and when, who acted in them and how good the shows were, are all lost in the mists of time. But in those experimental days when television's main function was to provide primitive visual accompaniment to live drama of the sort that was heard on radio every night, it's not surprising that the popularity of Woolrich-based scripts on *Suspense* and similar radio series led TV pioneers to try out some of his work in the new medium.

Television took a few years to catch on with the American people, and there was a three-year hiatus before Woolrich was again approached by the entrepreneurs of the small screen. His earnings from TV adaptation rights totaled $1,750 in 1949, $1,800 in 1950 and $1,700 in 1951. Unfortunately Woolrich's records through 1957 are extremely skimpy, not even indicating how many sales he made. And even the best existing sources on episodic television, like Larry James Gianakos's multi-volume *Television Drama Series Programming: A Comprehensive Chronicle*, customarily list only the titles and principal players in weekly teledrama. Consequently we can't know, when we come across a reference to a play with a cliché title like "Nightmare," whether it was taken from the Woolrich classic of the same name or whether the identity of titles is pure coincidence. In any event, at least ten live TV dramas clearly based on Woolrich's fiction were aired between 1949 and 1951.

The earliest known TV play taken from Woolrich material was "Revenge," broadcast on CBS' *Suspense* series March 1, 1949, and based on the 1944 novel *The Black Path of Fear*. As we've seen, an excellent thirty-minute version of this book had already been aired twice on the *Suspense* radio program, with Brian Donlevy starring in 1944 and Cary Grant in 1946. In all probability the half-hour live televersion was similar to the radio adaptation. In the leading roles were Eddie Albert and Margo, the first and only actress to play the female lead in different Woolrich-based dramas in all three media.

The next known teleplay based on Woolrich was seen on the last day of that same month in 1949. On March 31 a live series called *The Actor's Studio*, which had debuted on ABC in the fall of 1948, offered a thirty-minute adaptation of Woolrich's unforgettable 1938 story "Three O'Clock." As it happened, radio's *Suspense* had presented a superb thirty-minute version of the same story, starring Van Heflin, on the tenth of the same month. The first of what were to be several televersions starred Steven Hill, Frances Reid and Philip Bourneuf.

If Woolrich and his mother had a TV set in the spring of 1949, they could have watched three live thirty-minute versions of his stories in about a month's time and another trio at the end of the year. *Suspense* for April 5 offered Anthony Ross and Mildred Natwick in "The Man Upstairs," based on Woolrich's 1945 tale of a fugitive hiding in a boardinghouse, and on April 12 broadcast "After-Dinner Story," based on the 1938 thriller of the same name, and staring Otto Kruger, who had also played the lead in *Suspense*'s 1943 radio version. On May 10 the same series presented "Post Mortem," adapted by Frank Gabrielson from Woolrich's 1940 venture in black humor, with Peggy Conklin and Sidney Blackmer in the principal parts. On November 21 CBS' *Silver Theater*, a weekly dramatic series hosted by Conrad Nagel, aired a teleplay based on Woolrich's 1945 story "Silent As the Grave," starring Marsha Hunt and TV's later Superman, George Reeves. And ABC's *Mystery Playhouse*, whose host was Boris Karloff, turned out the medium's second adaptation of "Three O'Clock" on December 1 plus a televersion of Woolrich's 1936 "The Night Reveals" on the fifteenth of that month. No cast list from either episode seems to exist.

Woolrich's next breakthrough in live TV came in 1950 with the first use of his fiction as the basis of a sixty-minute teledrama. The series that scored this coup was *Robert Montgomery Presents*, one of the prestige items of early television. Montgomery had already shown his affinity with *film noir* in general and Woolrich in particular, for he had both directed and starred in two *noir* movies, *The Lady in the Lake* (MGM, 1946) and *Ride the Pink Horse* (Universal, 1947), and he had also played the leads in two sixty-minute dramas—"The Chase" on *This Is Hollywood* in 1946 and "The Black Curtain" on *Suspense* in 1948—which had stemmed from Woolrich novels. For the first Woolrichian offering on his weekly television series Montgomery chose "Phantom Lady," broadcast April 24, 1950, and based of course on the classic 1942 novel. Ella Raines starred as she had in the 1944 movie and radio versions—which made her the first and only woman to play the female lead in different adaptations into all three media of the same Woolrich source work—with a pair of unknowns named Hugh Reilly and Gordon Mills in supporting roles.

The half-hour TV dramas didn't neglect Woolrich during 1950. On May 21, NBC's Sunday evening *Video Theatre* aired "Change of Murder," based on the author's 1936 tale in the Damon Runyon vein, and starring Bernard Nedell, Charles Jordan and Alfred Hopson, whoever they were. On November 9 of the same year CBS' *Nash Airflyte Theater*, hosted by William Gaxton, presented "I Won't Take a Minute," based on Woolrich's 1940 "Finger of Doom," with Dane Clark as the man whose girlfriend walks into a building to deliver a package and never comes out.

The first of two Woolrich stories adapted into thirty-minute teleplays during 1951 was "Through a Dead Man's Eye," based on the 1939 chiller about a twelve-year-old boy trapped in an old house with a decaying one-eyed corpse and a murderer. The episode was seen July 21, 1951 on NBC's summer replacement series *Assignment Manhunt*. No cast list has come to light. That same year Robert Montgomery picked two of Woolrich's strongest and darkest tales for his sixty-minute weekly series. "Three O'Clock" (June 18, 1951) came of course from the 1938 classic which had earlier been adapted for both *The Actor's Studio* and *Mystery Playhouse*. Vaughn Taylor starred as Stapp, the man who is bound and gagged in his own basement with a time bomb ticking away beside him, and Olive Deering and Montgomery himself played key supporting roles. Another Woolrich immortal from 1938 was the basis of the *Robert Montgomery Presents* production "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (October 22, 1951), with Vaughn Taylor and Katherine Squire as the couple doomed by a malignant fate because of a shoe thrown at a yowling cat. The second thirty-minute teleplay of the year to be based on Woolrich was "Nightmare," broadcast on CBS' *Suspense* November 7, 1951, and based on the 1941 novelette "And So to Death." Richard Kiley and Berry Kroeger starred in the tale of the young man who wakes up from a bad dream in which he committed a murder, only to find objective evidence of the crime all over himself.

Woolrich made not a cent from television in 1952, but that was the last year of his life in which the medium ignored him. His income from the small screen in 1953 added up to precisely $2,000. By then TV's center of gravity had started to shift from live drama staged in New York to thirty-minute films, shot in Hollywood on two- or three-day schedules and rerunnable *ad infinitum* after their first showing. *Revlon Mirror Theatre* had begun on NBC in the summer of 1953 as a series of thirty-minute live dramas but in the fall it moved to CBS and switched to film. Its third film presentation was "Lullaby," broadcast October 3, 1953, and based on Woolrich's 1937 story "Humming Bird Comes Home." Agnes Moorehead, Tom Drake and Betty Lynn starred as the blind mother, the fugitive son and the farm girl. And the *Mirror Theatre* film on November 21, 1953, "Summer Dance," also was rooted in Woolrich, being based on his 1947 story "Death Between Dances." Jane Greer and Barbara Bates played the haunted sisters who, years apart, fall in love with the same man. In between these telefilms, on October 9, 1953, ABC's *Pepsi-Cola Playhouse* broadcast a live thirty-minute drama, "Wait for Me Downstairs," with John Hudson and Allene Roberts in yet another version of the Woolrich classic "Finger of Doom."

In 1954 Woolrich made $1,800 from licensing TV plays taken from his fiction, but I've found only two dramas based on his work that were broadcast that year, and apparently neither had much to do with what he had written. The earlier was seen on ABC's *The Mask*, the first hour-long mystery series on television. At the start of the new year, hoping to compete against CBS' and NBC's Sunday evening giants (*Toast of the Town* and *The Colgate Comedy Hour*), ABC launched an ambitious new dramatic program, starring Gary Merrill and William Prince as Walter and Peter Guilfoyle, brothers, law partners and amateur detectives who became entangled in a baffling case every week. Some of the episodes of *The Mask* were original scripts, others were adapted from short stories by well-known mystery writers, with the plots heavily altered and the Guilfoyle brothers shoehorned into the continuity to clear up the puzzlement. In "The Loophole," broadcast February 7, 1954, the Guilfoyles tried to clear an innocent man framed for murder. The brothers' client was played by Brian Keith, supported by Russell Hardy, Audrey Christie and Betty Garde. The script was nominally based on Woolrich's powerful 1942 story "Three Kills for One," which had been reprinted in the September 1953 *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* under what became its TV title. I didn't watch the program, but my best guess is that the teleplay took up where Woolrich's story left off—with a vindictive and psychotic cop framing a man for one killing because in the cop's view the man got away with an earlier murder. It's safe to assume that nothing remotely like Woolrich's terrifying climax was permitted in the TV version. *The Mask* quickly proved to be a ratings disaster and was canceled after the customary thirteen-week run.

Another live sixty-minute drama vaguely based on Woolrich was offered the night before New Year's Eve on *Lux Video Theatre*, the TV offshoot of the long-running *Lux Radio Theatre*. "The Chase," broadcast on NBC December 30, 1954, was an adaptation of the bizarre 1946 *film noir* of the same name which had been very freely taken from Woolrich's novel *The Black Path of Fear*. The movie, directed by Arthur Ripley, had starred Robert Cummings as the footloose adventurer Chuck Scott, Michele Morgan as Lorna, and Steve Cochran as her sadistic husband Eddie Roman. The televersion, which was even less like the novel than the movie had been, featured Pat O'Brien as Eddie, with Ruth Roman as Lorna and a pre-*Gunsmoke* James Arness as Chuck, who falls in love with Lorna and tries to save them both from Eddie's fury. James Mason served as host for the eisode.

Woolrich's earnings from television in 1955 totaled a whopping $9,350, enough in itself for a comfortable living at the time. Although he didn't keep detailed figures for that year, it's likely that much of this money came from the sale of rights to stories that weren't televised till 1956, for the only known Woolrich-based dramas during 1955 were a trio of thirty-minute films for which he probably received about a thousand dollars apiece.

The earliest of the three was "Debt of Honor," broadcast February 20, 1955, on CBS's Sunday evening anthology series *Stage 7* and adapted from yet another Woolrich classic first published in 1938, "I.O.U.—One Life." The title of the teleplay, like that of "The Loophole" the year before, we owe to Fred Dannay, who had retitled the story "Debt of Honor" for its reprint appearance in the October 1954 *EQMM*. The TV script apparently stayed close to Woolrich's story line in which a detective learns that the criminal he must arrest is the man who earlier saved the life of the cop's little daughter. Edmond O'Brien played the cop and superstar-to-be Charles Bronson was the fugitive. The cast included Wendy Winkleman, Laura Elliot and Steve Pendleton.

The other Woolrich-derived telefilms of 1955 were made by Screen Gems, Columbia Pictures's TV subsidiary, and shown four weeks apart on NBC's *Ford Theatre*. Surprisingly, the stories *Ford* bought were not suspense thrillers but the pair of noncriminous tales that Woolrich had failed to sell to magazines and had included as originals in his 1949 collection *The Blue Ribbon*. "Husband," broadcast October 13, 1955, starred Barry Sullivan as Blaine Chandler, whose wife has become movie star Alma Alexander because of a photograph he took. Like the heroines of countless recent feminist stories, Chandler suffocates in the role of Famous Person's Spouse, and is about to break away and assert his own identity by opening a photography studio when the Korean War comes along and acts as *deus ex machina* to save the marriage. Mala Powers played Chandler's wife, with Jonathan Hale, Ralph Dumke and Frank Hanley in character parts. The story line had almost nothing in common with Woolrich's tale of a marriage at crack-up point. On the other hand "The Blue Ribbon," *Ford Theatre*'s presentation for November 10, 1955, was a quite faithful rendition of Woolrich's story about the dreadful woman who makes her son wear a blue ribbon in his hair so that he'll have to fight the other neighborhood boys and grow up, as in fact he does, to become a boxing champ. Ted Post (b.1925), who later helmed some high-budget action films with Clint Eastwood and Steve McQueen, directed from a teleplay by Richard Collins. Scott Brady starred as the boxer O'Reilly, with Gene Barry as his buddy Carp and Marjorie Rambeau as his mother. The film carefully captures everything that makes the Woolrich story so freakish, including his reverence for the dreadful mother figure and contempt for his own small size and physical weakness and homosexuality.

Woolrich's hefty 1955 income from TV must have included payment for the rights to three stories that were first shown early the following year. "Once Upon a Nightmare" was broadcast January 3, 1956, on NBC's long-running anthology series *Fireside Theatre*. The basis of the thirty-minute film was Woolrich's 1941 tale "Murder at Mother's Knee," which came to *Fireside*'s attention when it was reprinted in the December 1954 *EQMM* as "Something That Happened in Our House." Series hostess Jane Wyman starred as schoolteacher Emily Prince, who assigns her students to write a composition about an actual event and then slowly becomes convinced that the essay handed in by one ten-year-old describes a murder the child unwittingly witnessed. David Kasday, Arthur Space, Vivi Janiss and Emile Meyer were in the cast.

Fireside was a Tuesday evening program. The following Sunday, January 8, 1956, the now classic suspense series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, which was then in its first season, broadcast the first of several Woolrich-based telefilms. Hitchcock of course had directed the classic *Rear Window* (1954), which was adapted from a Woolrich story; but he was not personally involved with any of the thirty-minute telefilms based on Woolrich that were shown on this series. "The Big Switch" was directed by Don Weis (b.1922) from a script by Richard Carr loosely based on Woolrich's Runyonesque 1936 story "Change of Murder." The same tale had been the source of a live drama aired on *Video Theatre* with a cast of total unknowns back in 1950, and as luck would have it the cast of the *Hitchcock Presents* version also consisted of obscurities, headed by George Mathews, George E. Stone, Joseph

Downing and Beverly Michaels. All that remained of the Woolrich story was the basic idea—a gunman planning to commit a murder buys an alibi from a specialist in such matters—and the ironic ending, which had the kind of twist *Hitchcock Presents* thrived on. Those who were watching another channel that evening didn't miss much.

Less than a month later, on February 2, 1956, CBS' *Four Star Playhouse* presented "The Listener," from a script by Frank L. Moss based on Woolrich's 1939 novelette "The Case of the Talking Eyes," better known as "Eyes That Watch You." Ida Lupino starred as ruthless Vera Miller, whose plot to murder her husband Verne (Walter Coy) and collect his insurance is overheard by Verne's father (Ralph Moody), a speechless paralytic. The cast included Lupino's son Richard and, in a small part as an announcer, Don Rickles.

In 1956 Woolrich earned a whopping $13,650 from television, his best year ever in that medium, and saw his work form the basis of four half-hour films, two hour-long live dramas and a ninety-minute super special. The more elaborate and prestigious of the pair of sixty-minute teleplays was "Sit Down with Death," broadcast live and in color April 26, 1956, on CBS's extremely popular series *Climax!* James P. Cavanagh's adaptation of Woolrich's 1938 "After-Dinner Story" followed the original quite closely. One of the people trapped in a disabled elevator is pulled out of the wreckage and found to have been shot to death. The police decide that he killed himself while pinned in the elevator shaft, but the victim's father becomes obsessed with the notion that one of the others imprisoned in the cage murdered him, and embarks on a grisly revenge. The father was portrayed by Ralph Bellamy, and the excellent supporting cast included William Talman, John Williams, Vicki Cummings and Constance Ford.

The fourth and final thirty-minute film based on Woolrich to be seen that year was "Momentum," broadcast June 24, 1956 on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. Robert Stevens directed from a script by Francis Cockrell adapted from Woolrich's downbeat 1940 thriller "Murder Always Gathers Momentum." But the film doesn't even try to capture the Depression ambience and *noir* sensibility of the story. Skip Homeier portrays the doomed Richard Paine as a juvenile delinquent, and even though Stevens and Cockrell eliminate all the subsequent killings Paine commits after accidentally shooting his wealthy former employer in the course of a burglary, one doesn't feel the slightest empathy with this version of Paine as he slides down the path to destruction. Joanne Woodward played Paine's wife.

On October 11, 1956, *Lux Video Theatre* broadcast its second sixty-minute live drama based on a movie with Woolrichian roots. The nominal source of Monogram's 1947 *The Guilty* had been Woolrich's 1941 novelette "He Looked Like Murder"/"Two Fellows in a Furnished Room," but as we've seen, the filmmakers had adulterated the Woolrich story line—young man tries to save his roommate who has gone on the run after the woman he loves but can't have is murdered—with clichés from recent *films noirs* and the absurd "surprise" ending from the *Suspense* radio version of the same story. The *Lux* televersion seems to have been less ambitious than the movie and even more remote from what Woolrich had written. Gordon MacRae was host for he episode, which starred Ralph Meeker and was aired in color on NBC.

Exactly two weeks later came what from the point of view of money and prestige was Woolrich's biggest TV night ever. CBS's *Playhouse 90,* the highest-budgeted and most critically hailed dramatic series of its time, brought Woolrich's powerful 1948 novel *Rendezvous in Black* to the small screen in a ninety-minute adaptation under its original title. The basic premise comes straight from the book: Johnny Mark (Johnny Marr in the novel) finds his fiancée dead on a street corner, apparently the victim of a freak accident, and sets out to find the people responsible, dedicating himself to entering their lives one by one and killing not the perpetrators but the person each of them most loves, so that they will live the grief he lives. Among the stars of this ambitious live drama were at least three whose careers had intersected with Woolrich before: Franchot Tone, who had played the twisted murderer in the 1944 movie *Phantom Lady* and the 1946 *Hour of Mystery* radio version; Boris Karloff, who had hosted the *Mystery Playhouse* series where two early TV adaptations of Woolrich stories had been aired; and Tom Drake, the Humming Bird character in *Revlon Mirror Theatre*'s 1953 film "Lullaby," who enacted the principal role of Johnny Mark on *Playhouse 90*. The female leads were Laraine Day, Viveca Lindfors and Elizabeth Patterson, and the entire episode was hosted by Frank Lovejoy, who had starred in "Papa Benjamin" for CBS Radio's *Escape*.

Other Woolrich-based dramas may also have been televised in 1956. The author's financial records indicate that on March 27 of that year The Web Productions contracted with him for a TV adaptation of his 1936 story "Double Feature," but no trace of any live or filmed version of the tale has come to light. And on July 7, 1956, Screen Gems signed an agreement for TV rights to Woolrich's 1939 novelette "Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight," but no telefilm based on this story has yet been found either.

During 1957 Woolrich's income from TV totaled a paltry $1,400. In view of the multitudinous televersions of his work broadcast that year, it takes no Poirot to deduce that most of them were contracted and paid for during the boom year of 1956. The earliest Woolrich-based drama of 1957 was "The Earring," a thirty-minute telefilm presented January 13 on CBS' Sunday evening *General Electric Theater* and adapted from Woolrich's 1943 novelette "The Death Stone." Greer

Garson starred as Lydia Shaw, who's being blackmailed by her forme sweetheart Phil (Philip Reed) over some premarital love letters but i determined to keep her prominent lawyer husband David (Eduar Franz) from finding out about the affair. Also in the cast was Norma Lloyd. Hosting the episode as he did every week at this time wa Ronald Reagan.

Three weeks later, on February 2, 1957, Revue Productions' syndicated series *Heinz Studio 57* presented the thirty-minute film "Yo Take Ballistics," based on Woolrich's 1938 story of the same name Joseph Wiseman and superstar-to-be Lee Marvin played the cop an the killer in the tale of a murder suspect who stymies the police b admitting everything about the crime he committed except the killing itself. The telefilm, which I've never seen, almost certainly toned down the brutality of Woolrich's story to the vanishing point.

We might almost believe that the medium had set a quota of one Woolrich story a month, for on March 28, 1957, *Lux Video Theatre* broadcast its third and last sixty-minute live version of a movie taken from one of his works. The 1946 *Black Angel*, starring Dan Duryea, June Vincent, Peter Lorre and Broderick Crawford, had been a superb *film noir*, at once far removed from the letter and utterly faithful to the spirit of Woolrich's 1943 novel. The live version on *Lux* was naturally closer to the film than to its literary source. A married man is convicted of the murder of his mistress and sentenced to die, and the man's wife joins with the dead woman's love-flayed ex-husband to prove that the wrong person was found guilty, but with the inevitability of tragedy the searchers find themselves falling in love with each other. Marilyn Erskine and John Ireland played the leads and the episode was hosted by Gordon MacRae.

April followed the pattern by bringing forth its own Woolrich TV night as had the previous months of the year. The April 14 offering of CBS' *General Electric Theater* was "Cab Driver," adapted by John L. Greene from Woolrich's 1937 tale "Cab, Mister?" with the emphasis on humor. Imogene Coca, the comedienne who had shot to small screen superstardom opposite Sid Caesar on *Your Show of Shows*, played New York hackie Virginia Odell, who discovers a passenger murdered in her cab and becomes involved in a comic romance with the long-suffering sergeant assigned to the case (Keenan Wynn) while trying to dodge the killer. Apparently the film was geared for Coca's comic talent and negligible when it came to suspense. Ronald Reagan again hosted.

No more adaptations of Woolrich stories came on the air until the dog days of summer. On August 31, 1957, NBC's Saturday evening replacement series *George Sanders Mystery Theatre* presented "The Night I Died," a thirty-minute film based on Woolrich's 1936 tale of the same name. The televersion begins like the story, with a man oming home early from work and walking in on his wife and her boyfriend plotting to kill him for his insurance. In the Woolrich hriller the male conspirator is killed in a fight with the husband, who s then persuaded by the wife to go into hiding while she passes off the lead man's body as the husband's and collects the insurance for the wo of them. It's not clear how much of this scheme is used in the elefilm. The undistinguished cast was headed by Howard McNear, Eve McVeagh and Scotty Beckett.

For those who love the haunted Woolrich world, *the* night to have een sitting in front of the small screen was September 30, 1957, when the sixty-minute dramatic series *Suspicion*, which alternated between live and filmed productions, broadcast the most perfect Woolrich-based film ever made. Its title was "Four O'Clock" and its source the already thrice televised 1938 classic "Three O'Clock," which for my money is the most powerful story Woolrich ever wrote. The script was by Francis Cockrell, a veteran of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, and the director of the film was Hitchcock himself. What he brought to the small screen was an absolute masterwork, pure Hitchcock and pure Woolrich at one and the same time, the most unremittingly suspenseful picture in the director's long career. Why he retitled it "Four O'Clock" no one knows, but my guess is that with his own Catholic roots he caught the subliminal allusion in Woolrich's title to the death of Jesus and was afraid of it. In 1954, when he'd directed *Rear Window*, Hitchcock had radically expanded the Woolrich source story and altered its tone from *noir* to multichromatic so as to suit his own needs; in directing "Four O'Clock" he was working with a Woolrich story that perfectly reflected Hitchcock's own existential nightmares, and so he made only minimal changes in Woolrich's unbearable account of the last hours of a man who knows the exact moment when he will die in agony. E.G. Marshall was magnificent as Stapp, with Nancy Kelly and Richard Long in the principal supporting roles. If ever a film made for TV deserved to be revived as a theatrical feature or on videocassette, this is it.

Woolrich's financial records are meticulously detailed only for the years after his mother's death when he was totally alone. His earnings from television during the first such year, 1958, added up to $3,525. From Revue Productions he received $1,250 for TV film rights to his 1940 story "Post Mortem." Another company gave him $100 for an option it never exercised on his 1936 thriller "Johnny on the Spot." For TV film rights to his 1937 tale "Don't Bet on Death" he was paid an even $1,000, although I've found no sign of any telefilm based on this story. As residual royalties from the 1955 TV film "Debt of Honor" he was sent a check for $50. His last and largest chunk of television money that year came from the CBS series *Pursuit*, which paid $1,125 for the right to broadcast a sixty-minute live drama based on the bitter 1942 classic "Three Kills for One" that had earlier been used as an episode of *The Mask*. Unfortunately *Pursuit* was a ratings failure and left the air before its planned Woolrich adaptation could be shown.

I've found only two Woolrich-based telefilms that were first broadcast in 1958. "Bluebeard's Seventh Wife," seen March 21 on CBS' long-lived Friday evening *Schlitz Playhouse of Stars*, was based on Woolrich's 1936 novelette of the same name in which homicide detective Rich Doakes becomes suspicious that the man his kid sister has just married is a pathological wife killer and shadows the young couple on their Atlantic City honeymoon. The televersion changed Doakes' name to Rich Adams and junked Woolrich's subliminal incest motif by converting the protagonist's sister into his girlfriend, who naturally enough believes that the detective's suspicions are rooted in simple jealousy. Starring as Adams was Ralph Meeker, who has also played a Woolrich lead in the *Lux Video Theatre* production "The Guilty." Phyllis Avery played the woman, and her new husband was Hugh Marlowe, best known for starring in radio's and later TV's *Ellery Queen* series. Marlowe's suave personality altered the character of the bridegroom, whom Woolrich had portrayed as a brutal lout.

On May 18, 1958, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* broadcast its thirty-minute film of "Post Mortem." Arthur Hiller (b.1923), later a huge success with blockbuster features like 1971's *Love Story*, directed from a script by Robert C. Dennis based on Woolrich's 1940 story. Joanna Moore played the woman who suddenly realizes that her late first husband was the holder of a winning sweepstakes ticket apparently in the pocket of his burial suit, Steve Forrest was cast as Moore's second husband, and James Gregory portrayed the inevitable cop.

Woolrich's TV earnings for 1959 were only $1,700: $50 in further "Debt of Honor" residuals, $75 apiece for Japanese TV rights to "The Earring" and "Double Feature," and $1,500 from the British company Towers of London for permission to make a feature-length telefilm based on the suspense-crammed 1939 novelette "You'll Never See Me Again." The picture was directed by Ted Post, who had earlier made "The Blue Ribbon" for *Ford Theater*, and was broadcast in 1959 on England's ITV (independent commercial television) network as part of the *Armchair Summer Theater* series. Ben Gazzara was imported from the U.S. to star as the young man who, accused of murder after his wife vanishes following a quarrel, desperately tries to prove she's still alive. The rest of the cast was British, including Leo Genn as the skeptical police inspector, Brenda de Banzie as the missing woman's mother (or is she?) and James Hayter as de Banzie's husband. Tony Williams, a British-born professor now teaching in the United States, happened to watch the telefilm and shared his recollection of it with me. "A pre-credits sequence," he says, "opens with a man (seen from the waist down) walking towards a woman washing her hair in a basin. We don't see her face so ambiguity is created about who the characters are from the very beginning. He proceeds to drown her in the basin." Then after the credits Gazzara reports his wife's disappearance to Genn and the two of them visit the home of de Banzie and Hayter where doubt is cast on Gazzara's story and he escapes from the police. Eventually, more or less as in Woolrich's story, Gazzara persuades Genn to return with him to the supposed in-laws' house and tear down the bricked-up wall. "The opening of the wall was very chillingly filmed. When the bricks are removed, a female corpse falls erect, face towards the camera" and they discover that the body is not Gazzara's wife—who in this version is never seen. "All I remember of the climax," Williams says, "is a long shot of Gazzara walking towards a trunk and kneeling down to view his wife's drugged body. . . . I vaguely remember the ending to be Gazzara and Genn parting amicably back at police headquarters with the news that Gazzara's wife is recovering." If only this film were available in the States!

As far as television revenue went, 1960 was virtually a one-shot year for Woolrich. NBC paid him $1,250 for the right to present a sixty-minute drama based on his 1936 classic "The Night Reveals" about an insurance investigator who slowly comes to believe that his wife is a compulsive pyromaniac. The TV adaptation by David Davidson, retitled "Fire by Night," was broadcast July 22, 1960, as an episode of NBC's live summer replacement series *Moment of Fear.* Mark Richman and Fay Spain starred as Harry and Marie Jordan, with Phyllis Hill and Frank Overton in backup roles. The only other money Woolrich made from the small screen that year was $93.75 for Japanese TV rights to his 1945 story "Dipped in Blood"/"Fountain Pen."

He fared much better the following year thanks to the success of the weekly sixty-minute film series *Thriller,* hosted by Boris Karloff, which had debuted on NBC in the fall of 1960. Many *Thriller* episodes were based on novels or short stories by well-known American mystery writers including Charlotte Armstrong, Fredric Brown, Philip MacDonald, Margaret Millar and Lionel White. During 1961, the production company making the series paid Woolrich $4,600 for TV film rights to three of his most renowned stories. The *Thriller* trio turned out to be the only Woolrich-based telefilms broadcast in 1961 but their quality more than compensated for the lack of quantity. The first of the three to go on the air was "Papa Benjamin," broadcast March 21, 1961 and based on Woolrich's 1935 story (originally entitled "Dark Melody of Madness") about a jazz composer-bandleader who is put under a curse when he learns too much about a voodoo cult. Ted Post directed his third Woolrich-derived telefilm in efficient and workmanlike but unmemorable style, and John Kneubuhl's script moved the setting from New Orleans to the Caribbean but kept reasonably faithful to its source. John Ireland starred as the doomed musician Eddie Wilson, with Jeanne Bal as his wife Judy and Jester Hairston as the witchdoctor Papa Benjamin.

Two weeks later, on April 4, *Thriller* presented "Late Date," directed by TV veteran Herschel Daugherty from an adaptation by Donald S. Sanford of another 1935 Woolrich classic, "The Corpse and the Kid," better known as "Boy with Body." Daugherty's inspired direction combined with a spine-tingling Jerry Goldsmith music score to turn "Late Date" into one of the finest examples of *telefilm noir.* As in Woolrich's story, a young man (Larry Pennell) finds that his beloved father (Edward C. Platt) has murdered his promiscuous stepmother and desperately tries to conceal the crime by carrying the woman's body out of the seaside town where the family lived and over to the roadhouse rendezvous where her current lover is waiting for her. The telefilm does full justice to Woolrich's nail-biting account of the boy's journey with the rug-wrapped body. Despite a less than stellar cast and a censorially required last-minute reversal of Woolrich's ending, "Late Date" is one of the three best Woolrich-based films made for television.

The third and final *Thriller* taken from Woolrich was even better. As the second presentation of its second and last season the series managers chose "Guillotine," based on the unforgettable 1939 story first published as "Men Must Die." Like "Three O'Clock," the tale is a gem of existential suspense rooted in the protagonist's knowing the exact moment of his gruesome death and flailing wildly to avert his fate. In late nineteenth-century France, Robert Lamont (Alejandro Rey) approaches the hour when he is to be guillotined while his girlfriend Babette (Danielle de Metz) desperately tries to poison the grotesquely obese headsman (Robert Middleton) on his way to the scaffold, in hope of invoking the tradition that if the executioner dies just before a beheading the victim is spared. Ida Lupino (b.1918), who enriched *film noir* as an actress and behind the cameras, directed from a script by science-fiction writer Charles Beaumont. I was eighteen when I saw this film, and even though I had read the Woolrich story and knew exactly what to expect, the picture left me gasping with fright.

The rest of Woolrich's 1961 television income was from abroad. A French company paid $342.31 for licensing a production of "The Case of the Talking Eyes," which had been the basis of *Four Star Playhouse*'s 1956 film "The Listener," and a Japanese organization gave him $240 for the right to adapt four of his tales: "Collared," "Dipped in Blood," "The Corpse and the Kid" and "After-Dinner Story."

In 1962, one of the leanest years of Woolrich's life as far as TV went, he earned from the medium a grand total of $270, consisting of $150 in further residuals on "Debt of Honor" and $120 for Japanese TV rights to "After-Dinner Story" and "Humming Bird Comes Home." The only new Woolrich-based film on American television that year was a sixty-minute version of his 1941 novel *The Black Curtain*, broadcast November 15, 1962, on CBS's *Alfred Hitchcock Hour.* Since Woolrich's financial records show no payment for this film, it seems that Hitchcock's production company must have purchased the remake option from Paramount Pictures's original contract with Woolrich under which it had filmed *Street of Chance* twenty years earlier. The 1962 televersion, scripted by Joel Murcott, was one of the first films directed by today's megahit moviemaker Sydney Pollack (b.1934). Richard Basehart starred as Townsend, whose nightmare begins when he recovers from a second blow on the head and learns that for the past few years he's been suffering amnesia and leading another life. His adventures in this version had almost nothing in common with Woolrich's novel nor with the previous movie and radio adaptations which had actually improved upon the novel. Lola Albright played Ruth, and the key supporting roles of a corrupt private eye, a friendly cabbie and a juvenile hood (none of the three resembling any character in Woolrich) went respectively to Lee Philips, Harold J. Stone and James Farentino.

"The Black Curtain" was the last Woolrich-based TV drama broadcast in the United States during his lifetime. All the money he received from the medium in his last years came from overseas. Japan continued to buy rights to a couple of his stories each year, and in 1963 he was paid $1,348.65 by Television Española for the right to air Spanish adaptations of twenty-six of his tales. Except for this bulk deal he never made more than a few hundred dollars out of TV from 1963 until his death five years later.

The next telefilm based on his work was broadcast—at least in some parts of the country—about a week after his funeral. The episode wasn't listed in *TV Guide* nor mentioned in Larry James Gianakos' multivolume chronicle of television drama, but on October 3, 1968, some if not all of ABC's affiliate stations offered "Jane Brown's Body," nominally adapted from Woolrich's 1938 novelette, as an installment of the network's short-lived series of sixty-minute British-made suspense and horror films *Journey to the Unknown.* Although overlong and pulpy, Woolrich's story generates fearsome power as the protagonist struggles to save his beloved from a gruesome and inevitable death. It's understandable that the novelette's grotesque aspects would be toned down for the small screen, but the film I saw in Oklahoma that evening had nothing at all in common with what Woolrich had written. *Journey to the Unknown* was produced by Hitchcock's longtime associate Joan Harrison, and perhaps it was her idea to turn the Woolrich story into a weak-tea imitation of Hitchcock's 1964 film *Marnie* and set it in the mod London of the swinging sixties. Alan Gibson (b.1938) directed from a script by Anthony Skene. At the top of the cast were Julie Harris and Stefanie Powers, supported by Alan MacNaughton, Sarah Lawson and David Burke. Woolrich had been paid $1,500 for the rights, but it's just as well he didn't live to see this disaster.

There was a hiatus of four and a half years before the next film based on Woolrich made it to prime time. *You'll Never See Me Again*, broadcast on ABC as a ninety-minute TV movie on February 28, 1973, was the result of 20th Century-Fox's purchase of screen rights to Woolrich's 1939 novelette, which had also inspired the British telefilm of 1959 with Ben Gazzara. Jeannot Szwarc (b.1937), one of the most reliable of TV moviemakers, directed from a script by William Wood and Gerald DiPego. The picture updated but in most respects followed Woolrich's account of a man's desperate search for the missing wife he's accused of having murdered. David Hartman starred as Ned Bliss, with Jess Walton as Vickie, the vanished woman, and Jane Wyatt and Ralph Meeker as her mother and stepfather. It was a solid professional job, not on the level of Hitchcock's "Four O'Clock" or Lupino's "Guillotine" but eminently watchable.

Most of the telefilms based on Woolrich since his death have been seen only on the home screens of Europe and Asia and information about them over here is nil. However, the 1986 Mystfest program book reports a cycle of six French pictures of about an hour's length apiece, broadcast on the FR3 channel in the spring of 1979. Credits for the half-dozen are included in the Woolrich TV checklist at the end of his book. The one I'd most like to see is "La Boucle d'Oreille," a fifty-five-minute version of Woolrich's 1943 novelette "The Death Stone" "The Earring," directed by Claude Chabrol (b.1930), the foremost filmmaker in France today, and with a music score by Chabrol's son Mathieu. Ever since I saw Chabrol's superb *Que La Bête Meure* (1969; U.S. title *This Man Must Die*) I had suspected the director was a Woolrich aficionado, and my hunch was confirmed when I met him in Italy in 1986. He claims that "La Boucle d'Oreille" wasn't very good. Perhaps someday we in the States will be able to judge for ourselves.

I can't believe it's worse than the two Woolrich-based telefilms shown by American networks during the eighties. A new version of "Guillotine" about forty-five minutes long was broadcast January 8, 1982, as an episode of *Darkroom*, a short-lived ABC series hosted by James Coburn which tried and failed dismally to be a carbon copy of Rod Serling's *Night Gallery* of ten years earlier. Rick Rosenthal (b.1949) directed from a teleplay by Peter Allan Fields which stayed reasonably close to Woolrich's 1939 story except for adding some sexual titillation and portraying the man sentenced to death as such a louse that we aren't divided against ourselves as we should be but dearly want to see his head sliced off. Michael Constantine played M.

de Paris, the executioner, with Patti d'Arbanville as Babette and France Benard as Pierre, *l'homme condamné.*

As of this writing the most recent TV film from a Woolrich source is "Four O'Clock," broadcast May 4, 1986, on NBC's abortive revival of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents.* This fifth televersion of "Three O'Clock" was directed by Andrew Mirisch (b.1953) from a script by Steve Bello. It's beyond my comprehension how two men intelligent enough to thrive in the pressure-cooker environment of TV production could have ruined a story that handed them everything they needed. Not only did Mirisch and Bello convert Woolrich's protagonist into a wealthy, vicious and corrupt judge—in other words, into a person so despicable that we enjoy every moment of his later agony—but they waited until about ten minutes before the end of the half-hour film to get the man tied up in the basement with a bomb ticking away, so that the crux of the story is reduced to only a fraction of the picture's running time. Kenneth McMillan as Judge Magrew makes us hate his character as much as we hated his racist fireman in 1981's *Ragtime,* even though this film is absurd unless we feel at one with the protagonist. If more Woolrich-based telefilms are made before the end of the century, let's hope they avoid the blunders of this one.

Thanks to the tighter censorship of the small screen and the extent to which programs were controlled by sponsors, there are few if any telefilms from the fifties which breathe the Woolrich spirit without being based on a Woolrich source, as did theatrical films like *Detour* and *D.O.A.* The TV films of more recent decades have been more lightly censored but have also moved away from Woolrichian inspiration almost completely. But since the infancy of the medium it has taken ideas from Woolrich without stint. Growing up in the fifties with my nose glued to the cathode ray tube, I was amazed to discover Woolrich story lines luring in episodes of, believe it or not, *The Lone Ranger.* In "The Star Witness" (1950) the masked rider of the plains rescued a boy with a reputation for whoppers, whose claim to have witnessed a murder has been believed only by the killers. In "Silent Voice" (1950) he used the blink-once-for-yes-twice-for-no routine to obtain testimony from a mute and paralyzed old woman. As my tastes moved with the advancing decade from cowboys to crime and cop shows, I came upon huge numbers of thirty-minute telefilms about a bar girl or dancer being staked out as bait to trap a psychotic murderer of women in her line of work. Readers of this book need not be told from whence the germs of these episodes sprang. I have no doubt there were dozens more. What Woolrich thought of the situation, whether he knew how useful the medium had found him, will never be known. But I visualize him in the last years of his life, sitting alone in his room at the Sheraton-Russell, passing the sleepless hours after midnight in front of his set, switching from channel to channel as Barry Malzberg tells us he did, hunting for old movies based on things he had written, and finding film after film and TV episode after TV episode that struck him as vaguely familiar. And laughing sardonically in the darkness.

CORNELL WOOLRICH: A CHECKLIST

NOTE

The initials used in this checklist—IWBIYS, ADS, IISDBIW, TDD, BC, DMB, TBR, SOTP, SNM, ETWY, BSW, NM, V, BTN, TFCW, TDSL, NW, AOD, FSCW, RW&4SN, DAD, VH, and BDWD—mean that a short story was later included in the appropriate Woolrich collection: *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes, After-Dinner Story, If I Should Die Before I Wake, The Dancing Detective, Borrowed Crime, Dead Man Blues, The Blue Ribbon, Somebody on the Phone, Six Nights of Mystery, Eyes That Watch You, Bluebeard's Seventh Wife, Nightmare, Violence, Beyond the Night, The Ten Faces of Cornell Woolrich, The Dark Side of Love, Nightwebs, Angels of Darkness, The Fantastic Stories of Cornell Woolrich, Rear Window and Four Short Novels, Darkness at Dawn, Vampire's Honeymoon,* or *Blind Date with Death.*

This checklist is a revised and updated version of the checklist prepared by Harold Knott, William Thailing and myself and published in the 1971 Woolrich collection *Nightwebs*. Another version, updated through 1984, was included in the 1985 Woolrich collection, *Darkness at Dawn*. The present version is updated through 1987.

I. NOVELS

Cover Charge. Boni & Liveright, 1926; no British or paperback editions. Note: Woolrich later adapted this novel into a three-act play of the same name, which was copyrighted in 1931 and renewed in 1959 but seems never to have been performed.

Children of the Ritz. Boni & Liveright, 1927; no British or paperback editions. Note: Before book publication this novel was serialized in four installments in *College Humor*, August–November 1927.

Times Square. Liveright, 1929; no British or paperback editions. Note: Before book publication this novel was serialized as "Hollywood Bound" in five installments in *Live Girl Stories*, November 1928–March 1929.

A Young Man's Heart. Mason, 1930; no British or paperback editions.

The Time of Her Life. Liveright, 1931; no British edition. First paperback: Mayfair pb, c1937.

Manhattan Love Song. Godwin, 1932; no British or paperback editions. Note: A hardcover reprint edition of this novel (Gregg Press, 1980) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

I Love You, Paris. 1933, unpublished. Note: In his autobiographical manuscript, *Blues of a Lifetime*, Woolrich tells how he came to write this novel and wound up throwing it in the garbage.

The Bride Wore Black. Simon & Schuster, 1940; Robert Hale, 1942. First paperback: Pocket Books pb #271, 1945. Note: This novel has been frequently reprinted in paperback under its original title, and once as *Beware the Lady* (Pyramid pb #80, 1953). The Collier paperback edition (Collier pb #AS606, 1964) contains an Introduction by Anthony Boucher, and the Ballantine paperback (Ballantine pb #30487, 1984) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

The Black Curtain. Simon & Schuster, 1941; no British edition. First paperback (digest-sized): Mercury pb #64, 1943. First paperback (normal-sized): Dell pb #208, 1947. Note: An early hardcover reprint edition (Grosset & Dunlap, 1942) contains stills from the movie *Street of Chance* (Paramount, 1942), which was based on this novel, and a recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30490, 1982) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Black Alibi. Simon & Schuster, 1942; Robert Hale, 1951. First paperback (abridged): HandiBooks pb #14, 1943. First paperback (unabridged): Collier pb #02665, 1965. Note: A recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30707, 1982) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Phantom Lady, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1942; Robert Hale, 1945. First paperback: Pocket Books pb #253, 1944. Note: Before book publication this novel was serialized, as "Phantom Alibi" by Cornell Woolrich, in six installments in *Detective Fiction/Flynn's Detective Magazine* (formerly *Detective Fiction Weekly*), May–October 1942. A recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30652, 1983) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

The Black Angel. Doubleday, 1943; Robert Hale, 1949. First paperback (digest-sized): Avon Murder Mystery Monthly #27, 1944. First paperback (normal-sized): Avon pb #96, 1946. Note: The Ace paperback edition (Ace pb #06505, 1969) contains an Afterword by Michael Avallone, and a recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30664, 1983) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Deadline at Dawn, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1944; Hutchinson, 1947. First paperback: Armed Services pb #878, 1945. Note: An early hardcover reprint edition (World, 1946) contains stills from the movie *Deadline at Dawn* (RKO, 1946), which was based on this novel, and a recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30653, 1983) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

The Black Path of Fear. Doubleday, 1944; no British edition. First paperback: Avon pb #106, 1946. Note: A recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30488, 1982) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Night Has a Thousand Eyes, as by George Hopley. Farrar & Rinehart, 1945; Penguin (London) pb #660, 1949. First paperback: Dell pb #679, 1953, as by William Irish. Note: A recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30667, 1983) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Waltz into Darkness, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1947; Hutchinson, 1948. First paperback (abridged): Ace pb #D-40, 1954. First paperback (unabridged): Ballantine pb #30669, 1983. Note: The Ballantine paperback edition contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Rendezvous in Black. Rinehart, 1948; Hodder & Stoughton, 1950. First paperback: Pocket Books pb #570, 1949. Note: Both a recent hardcover reprint edition of this novel (Gregg Press, 1979) and the Ballantine paperback (Ballantine pb #30489, 1982) contain an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

I Married a Dead Man, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1948; Hutchinson, 1950. First paperback: Avon pb #220, 1949. Note: A recent paperback edition (Ballantine pb #30670, 1983) contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Fright, as by George Hopley. Rinehart, 1950; Foulsham, 1952. First paperback: Popular Library pb #424, 1952.

Savage Bride. Gold Medal pb #136, 1950; no British edition.

Strangler's Serenade, as by William Irish. Rinehart, 1951; Robert Hale, 1952. First paperback: Popular Library pb #431, 1952.

Hotel Room. Random House, 1958; no British or paperback editions.

Death Is My Dancing Partner. Pyramid pb #G374, 1959; no British edition.

The Doom Stone. Avon pb #T408, 1960; no British edition. Note: Long before book publication, this novel was serialized as "The Eye of Doom" in four installments in *Argosy,* January 14–February 4, 1939. The final installment of the novel differs completely from that of the magazine version.

Into the Night. Mysterious Press, 1987. Note: This novel, which Woolrich worked on during the 1960s but left unfinished at his death, was completed by Lawrence Block. The published version of the book includes an Afterword by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

II. SEPARATELY PUBLISHED SHORT NOVELS

Marihuana. Dell 10¢ pb #11, 1951. Separate publication of novelette first published in *Detective Fiction Weekly,* May 3, 1941 and collected in Woolrich's *After-Dinner Story* (Lippincott, 1944).

You'll Never See Me Again. Dell 10¢ pb #26, 1951. Separate publication of novelette first published in *Street & Smith's Detective Story,* November 1939, and collected in Woolrich's *Nightwebs* (Harper & Row, 1971).

III. COLLECTIONS OF SHORT STORIES

I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1943; Hutchinson, 1946. First paperback (unabridged): Armed Services pb #1173, 1945. U.S. contents: "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 3/12/38); "Last Night" (heavily revised version of "The Red Tide," *Street & Smith's Detective Story,* 9/40); "Three O'Clock" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 10/1/38); "Nightmare" (*Argosy,* 3/1/41, as "And So to Death"); "Papa Benjamin" (*Dime Mystery,* 7/35, as "Dark Melody of Madness"). Note: Almost all paperback editions of this collection are scaled down from the hardcover original. *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes* (Mercury pb #82, 1944) consists only of "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" and "Last Night"; *Nightmare* (Reader's Choice Library pb #12, 1950) contains "Nightmare," "Three O'Clock" and "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes"; and *And So to Death* (Jonathan pb #J31, 1955) consists only of "Three O'Clock," "Nightmare" and "Papa Benjamin."

After-Dinner Story, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1944; Hutchinson, 1947. First paperback: Armed Services pb #S20, 1945. Reprinted as *Six Times Death*, Popular Library pb #137, 1948. U.S. contents: "After-Dinner Story" (*Black Mask*, 1/38); "The Night Reveals" (*Story*, 4/36); "An Apple a Day" (previously unpublished); "Marihuana" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 5/3/41); "Rear Window" (*Dime Detective*, 2/42, as "It Had to Be Murder"); "Murder Story" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 9/11/37).

If I Should Die Before I Wake, as by William Irish. Avon Murder Mystery Monthly pb #31, 1945; no British edition. First paperback (normal-sized): Avon pb #104, 1946. Contents: "If I Should Die Before I Wake" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 7/3/37); "I'll Never Play Detective Again" (*Black Mask*, 5/37); "Change of Murder" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 1/25/36); "A Death Is Caused" (*Dime Detective*, 5/43, as "Mind Over Murder"); "Two Murders, One Crime" (*Dime Detective*, 7/42, as "Three Kills for One"); "The Man Upstairs" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, 8/45).

The Dancing Detective, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1946; Hutchinson, 1948. First paperback: Popular Library pb #309, 1951. U.S. contents: "The Dancing Detective" (*Black Mask*, 2/38, as "Dime a Dance"); "Two Fellows in a Furnished Room" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 2/8/41, as "He Looked Like Murder"); "The Light in the Window" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, 4/46); "Silent As the Grave" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, 11/45); "The Detective's Dilemma" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 10/26/40); "Fur Jacket" (*Dime Detective*, 3/44, as "What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear"); "Leg Man" (*Dime Detective*, 8/43); "The Fingernail" (*Detective Tales*, 7/41, as "The Customer's Always Right").

Borrowed Crime, as by William Irish. Avon Murder Mystery Monthly pb #42, 1946; no British or normal-sized paperback editions. Contents: "Borrowed Crime" (*Black Mask*, 7/39); "The Cape Triangular" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 4/16/38); "Detective William Brown" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 9/10/38); "Chance" (*Black Mask*, 5/42, as "Dormant Account").

Dead Man Blues, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1947; Hutchinson, 1950. First paperback: Mercury pb #135, 1949. U.S. contents: "Guillotine" (*Black Mask*, 8/39, as "Men Must Die"); "The Earring" (*Flynn's Detective Fiction*, formerly *Detective Fiction Weekly*, 2/43, as "The Death Stone"); "If the Dead Could Talk" (*Black Mask*, 2/43); "Fire Escape" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, 3/47, as "The Boy Cried Murder"); "Fountain Pen" (*Street & Smith's Detective Story*, 4/45, as "Dipped in Blood"); "You Take Ballistics" (*Double Detective*, 1/38); "Funeral" (*Argosy*, 6/19/37, as "Your Own Funeral"). Note: "If the Dead Could Talk" is omitted from the Mercury paperback edition mentioned above.

The Blue Ribbon, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1949; Hutchinson, 1951. First paperback: *Dilemma of the Dead Lady,* Graphic pb #20, 1950. U.S. contents: "The Blue Ribbon" (previously unpublished); "The Dog with the Wooden Leg" (*Street & Smith's Detective Story,* 2/39); "The Lie" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 10/9/37); as by Chick Walsh, "Hot Towel" (*Double Detective,* 3/38); "Wardrobe Trunk" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 7/4/36, as "Dilemma of the Dead Lady"); "Wild Bill Hiccup" (*Argosy,* 2/5/38); "Subway" (*Argosy,* 8/22/36, as "You Pays Your Nickel"); "Husband" (previously unpublished). Note: "Wild Bill Hiccup" and "Husband" are omitted from the Graphic paperback edition mentioned above, which also rearranges the order of the stories.

Somebody on the Phone, as by William Irish. Lippincott, 1950; Hutchinson, 1951, as *The Night I Died.* First paperback: *Deadly Night Call,* Graphic pb #31, 1951. U.S. contents: "Johnny on the Spot" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 5/2/36); "Somebody on the Phone" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 7/1/37); "Collared" (*Black Mask,* 10/39); "The Night I Died" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 8/8/36, as by Anonymous); "Momentum" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 12/14/40, as "Murder Always Gathers Momentum"); "Boy with Body" (*Dime Detective,* 9/35, as "The Corpse and the Kid"); "Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 8/4/34); "The Room with Something Wrong" (*Detective Fiction Weekly,* 6/4/38, as "Mystery in Room 913"). Note: "Collared" and "The Night I Died" are omitted from the Graphic paperback edition mentioned above.

Six Nights of Mystery, as by William Irish. Popular Library pb #258, 1950; no British edition. Contents: "One Night in New York" (*Black Mask,* 10/37, as "Face Work"); "One Night in Chicago" (*Black Mask,* 10/39, as "Collared"); "One Night in Hollywood" (*Black Mask,* 7/44, as "Picture Frame"); "One Night in Montreal" (*Argosy,* 1/25/36, as "Crime on St. Catherine Street"); "One Night in Paris" (*Argosy,* 5/16/36, as "Underworld Trail"); "One Night in Zacamoras" (*Argosy,* 2/3/40, as "Señor Flatfoot").

Eyes That Watch You, as by William Irish. Rinehart, 1952; no British or paperback editions. Contents: "Eyes That Watch You" (*Dime Detective,* 9/39, as "The Case of the Talking Eyes"); "Stuck" (*Dime Detective,* 10/37, as "Stuck with Murder"); "Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight" (*Dime Detective,* 7/39); "Murder with a U" (*Dime Detective,* 3/41, as "U, As in Murder"); "All at Once, No Alice" (*Argosy,* 3/2/40); "Damned Clever, These Americans" (*Argosy,* 7/3/37, as "Clever, These Americans"); "Flat Tire" (*Dime Detective,* 5/38, as "Short Order Kill").

Bluebeard's Seventh Wife, as by William Irish. Popular Library pb #473, 1952; no British edition. Contents: "Bluebeard's Seventh

Wife" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 8/22/36); "The Morning After Murder" (heavily revised version of "Murder on My Mind," *Detective Fiction Weekly*, 8/15/36); "Silhouette" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 1/7/39); "The Hat" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 2/18/39, as "The Counterfeit Hat"); "Humming Bird Comes Home" (*Pocket Detective*, 3/37); "Through a Dead Man's Eye" (*Black Mask*, 12/39).

Nightmare. Dodd Mead, 1956; no British edition. First paperback: Dell pb #6421, 1964. Contents: "I'll Take You Home, Kathleen" (heavily revised version of "One Last Night," *Street & Smith's Detective Story*, 5/40); "Screen Test" (heavily revised version of "Preview of Death," *Dime Detective*, 11/15/34); "I.O.U." (*Double Detective*, 11/38, as "I.O.U.—One Life"); "Three O'Clock" (first collected in *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*); "Nightmare" (first collected in *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*); "Bequest" (*Detective Tales*, 9/42, as "Implacable Bequest").

Violence. Dodd Mead, 1958; no British or paperback editions. Contents: "Don't Wait Up for Me Tonight" (*Story*, 10/37, as "Goodbye, New York"); "Guillotine" (first collected in *Dead Man Blues*); "That New York Woman" (heavily revised version of "The Hopeless Defense of Mrs. Dellford," *Dime Detective*, 12/42); "Murder, Obliquely" (heavily revised version of "Death Escapes the Eye," *Shadow Mystery Magazine*, 4–5/47); "The Moon of Montezuma" (first half of "The Moon of Montezuma," *Fantastic*, 11–12/52); "The Corpse in the Statue of Liberty" (heavily revised version of "Red Liberty," *Dime Detective*, 7/1/35).

Beyond the Night. Avon pb #T354, 1959; no British edition. Contents: "The Moon of Montezuma" (*Fantastic*, 11–12/52); "Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life" (*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 12/58); "The Lamp of Memory" (*Argosy*, 12/18/37, as "Guns, Gentlemen"); "My Lips Destroy" (heavily revised version of "Vampire's Honeymoon," *Horror Stories*, 8–9/39); "The Number's Up" (previously unpublished); "Music from the Dark" (first collected as "Papa Benjamin" in *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*).

The Ten Faces of Cornell Woolrich. Simon & Schuster, 1965; Boardman, 1966. No paperback edition. U.S. contents: "One Drop of Blood" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 4/62); "Somebody on the Phone" (first collected in *Somebody on the Phone*); "Debt of Honor" (first collected as "I.O.U." in *Nightmare*); "The Man Upstairs" (first collected in *If I Should Die Before I Wake*); "The Most Exciting Show in Town" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 5/16/36, as "Double Feature"); "The Night Reveals" (first collected in *After-Dinner Story*; "Steps Going Up" (first collected as "Guillotine" in *Dead Man Blues*); "The Humming Bird Comes Home" (first collected in *Bluebeard's Seventh Wife*); "Adventures of a Fountain Pen" (first collected as "Fountain Pen" in *Dead Man Blues*); "I

Won't Take a Minute" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 6/22/40, as "Finger of Doom"). Note: This collection contains an introduction by Ellery Queen (Frederic Dannay).

The Dark Side of Love. Walker, 1965; no British or paperback editions. Contents: "Je t'Aime" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/64, as "When Love Turns"); "The Clean Fight" (previously unpublished"); "The Idol with the Clay Bottom" (*Knight*, ?/65); "The Poker Player's Wife" (*The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 10/62); "Story to Be Whispered" (revised version of "Story To Be Whispered," *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 5/63); "Somebody Else's Life" (revised version of "Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life," first collected in *Beyond the Night*); "I'm Ashamed" (previously unpublished); "Too Nice a Day to Die" (previously unpublished).

Nightwebs. Harper & Row, 1971; Gollancz, 1973. First paperback: Avon pb #19521, 1974. U.S. contents: "Graves for the Living" (*Dime Mystery*, 6/37); "The Red Tide" (*Street & Smith's Detective Story*, 9/40); "The Corpse Next Door" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 1/23/37); "You'll Never See Me Again" (*Street & Smith's Detective Story*, 11/39); "Dusk to Dawn" (*Black Mask*, 12/37); "Murder at the Automat" (*Dime Detective*, 8/37); "Death in the Air" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 10/10/36); "Mamie 'n' Me" (*All-American Fiction*, 5–6/38); "The Screaming Laugh" (*Clues Detective*, 11/38); "One and a Half Murders" (*Black Book Detective*, 7/36); "Dead on Her Feet" (*Dime Detective*, 12/35); "One Night in Barcelona" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, Fall/47); "The Penny-a-Worder" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/58); "The Number's Up" (first collected in *Beyond the Night*); "Too Nice a Day to Die" (first collected in *The Dark Side of Love*); "Life Is Weird Sometimes" (previously unpublished episode from *The Loser*, a novel unfinished at Woolrich's death). Note: This collection contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and a substantially complete checklist of Woolrich's work. The checklist and the last four stories are omitted from the British edition.

Angels of Darkness. Mysterious Press, 1978; no British or paperback editions. Contents: "Johnny on the Spot" (first collected in *Somebody on the Phone*); "Waltz" (*Double Detective*, 11/37); "The Book That Squealed" (*Street & Smith's Detective Story*, 8/39); "Meet Me by the Mannequin" (*Dime Detective*, 6/40); "Murder at Mother's Knee" (*Dime Detective*, 10/41); "Mind Over Murder" (first collected as "A Death Is Caused" in *If I Should Die Before I Wake*); "Death Escapes the Eye" (*Shadow Mystery Magazine*, 4–5/47); "For the Rest of Her Life" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/68). Note: This collection contains an Introduction by Harlan Ellison and an Afterword by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

The Fantastic Stories of Cornell Woolrich. Southern Illinois University

Press, 1981; no British or paperback editions. Contents: "Kiss of the Cobra" (*Dime Detective*, 5/1/35); "Dark Melody of Madness" (first collected as "Papa Benjamin" in *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*); "Speak to Me of Death" (*Argosy*, 2/27/37); "I'm Dangerous Tonight" (*All-American Fiction*, 11/37); "Guns, Gentlemen" (first collected as "The Lamp of Memory" in *Beyond The Night*); "Jane Brown's Body" (*All-American Fiction*, 3–4/38); "The Moon of Montezuma" (first collected in *Beyond The Night*); "Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life" (first collected in *Beyond the Night*). Note: This collection contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and an Afterword by Barry N. Malzberg.

Rear Window and Four Short Novels. Ballantine pb #30668, 1984; no British edition. Contents: "Rear Window" (first collected in *After-Dinner Story*); "Post-Mortem" (*Black Mask*, 4/40); "Three O'Clock" (first collected in *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*); "Change of Murder" (first collected in *If I Should Die Before I Wake*); "Momentum" (first collected in *Somebody on the Phone*). Note: This collection contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

Darkness at Dawn. Southern Illinois University Press, 1985; no British or paperback editions. Contents: "Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair" (first collected in *Somebody on the Phone*); "Walls That Hear You" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 8/18/34); "Preview of Death" (*Dime Detective*, 11/15/34); "Murder in Wax" (*Dime Detective*, 3/1/35); "The Body Upstairs" (*Dime Detective*, 4/1/35); "Kiss of the Cobra" (first collected in *The Fantastic Stories of Cornell Woolrich*); "Dark Melody of Madness" (first collected as "Papa Benjamin" in *I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*); "Red Liberty" (*Dime Detective*, 7/1/35); "The Corpse and the Kid" (first collected as "Boy with Body" in *Somebody on the Phone*); "Dead on Her Feet" (first collected in *Nightwebs*); "The Death of Me" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 12/7/35); "The Showboat Murders" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, 12/14/35); "Hot Water" (*Argosy*, 12/28/35). Note: This collection contains an Introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr., and a checklist of Woolrich's work, updated from *Nightwebs*.

Vampire's Honeymoon. Carroll & Graf pb, 1985; no British edition. Contents: "Vampire's Honeymoon" (*Horror Stories*, 8–9/39); "Graves for the Living" (first collected in *Nightwebs*); "I'm Dangerous Tonight" (first collected in *The Fantastic Stories of Cornell Woolrich*); "The Street of Jungle Death" (*Strange Detective Mysteries*, 7–8/39).

Blind Date with Death. Carroll & Graf pb, 1985; no British edition. Contents: "Blind Date with Death" (*Dime Detective*, 6/37); "The Living Lie Down with the Dead" (*Dime Detective*, 4/36); "Flowers from the Dead" (*Dime Detective*, 9/40); "The Riddle of the Redeemed Dips" (*Dime Detective*, 11/40); "The Case of the Maladroit Manicurist" (*Dime Detective*, 5/41); "Crazy House" (*Dime Detective*, 6/41); "If the Shoe Fits" (*Dime Detective*, 3/43); "Leg Man" (first collected in *The Dancing Detective*).

IV. SHORT FICTION

ACE-HIGH DETECTIVE

11/36 Evil Eye.

ALL-AMERICAN FICTION

11/37 I'm Dangerous Tonight. (FSCW.) (VH.)
3–4/38 Jane Brown's Body. (*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, 10/51; *13 Short Horror Novels*, ed. Charles G. Waugh & Martin H. Greenberg, 1987.) (FSCW.)
5–6/38 Mamie 'n' Me. (NW.)

ARGOSY

12/28/35 Hot Water. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/61.) (DAD.)
1/25/36 Crime on St. Catherine Street. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/66, as "All It Takes Is Brains.") (SNM, as "One Night in Montreal.")
5/16/36 Underworld Trail. (SNM, as "One Night in Paris.")
8/22/36 You Pays Your Nickel. (*The Third Mystery Companion*, ed. A.L. Furman, 1945; *Avon Detective Mysteries*, 3/47; *Midnight Specials*, ed. Bill Pronzini, 1977; *The Big Apple Mysteries*, ed. Carol-Lynn Rössel Waugh, Martin H. Greenberg & Isaac Asimov, 1982; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/83. All these reprints are under the title "The Phantom of the Subway.") (TBR, as "Subway.")
9/5/36 Gun for a Gringo.
11/7/36 Public Toothache Number One.
12/12/36 Holocaust.
2/27/37 Speak to Me of Death. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/49; *Fantasy Fiction*, 5/50; *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 3/66.) (FSCW.) (Note: This story was later expanded into the 1945 novel *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*.)
6/19/37 Your Own Funeral. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/48; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1962; *Ellery Queen's Lethal Black Book*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1965. All these reprints are under the title "That's Your Own Funeral.") (DMB, as "Funeral.")
7/3/37 Clever, These Americans. (ETWY, as "Damned Clever, These Americans.")

7/31/37 Black Cargo.

11/13/37 Oft in the Silly Night.

12/18/37 Guns, Gentlemen. (*The Fourth Mystery Companion*, ed. A.L. Furman, 1946, as "Twice-Trod Path.") (BTN, as "The Lamp of Memory.") (FSCW, under original title.)

1/29/38 Death in the Yoshiwara. (*Manhunt*, 1/53, as "The Hunted.")

2/5/38 Wild Bill Hiccup. (*The Armchair Companion*, ed. A.L. Furman, 1944; *Avon Western Reader #3*, 1947; *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 11/63.) (TBR.)

1/14/39 The Eye of Doom: I. (*Short Stories*, 12/58, as "The Devil with the Sparkling Face.")

1/21/39 The Eye of Doom: II. (*The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 7/62, as "Two Against the Terror," with ending slightly changed.)

1/28/39 The Eye of Doom: III.

2/4/39 The Eye of Doom: IV.

Note: The first three installments of this serial, along with a completely new fourth part, were published in book form as the 1960 novel *The Doom Stone*. The new Part 4 was reprinted as "Tokyo 1941" in *The Award Espionage Reader*, ed. Hans Stefan Santesson, 1965, and in *13 Short Espionage Novels*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Martin H. Greenberg, 1985.

2/3/40 Señor Flatfoot. (Revised version in SNM, as "One Night in Zacamoras.")

3/2/40 All at Once, No Alice. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 11/51; *Verdict*, 7/53; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1966.) (ETWY.)

6/23/40 Cinderella and the Mob. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 7/53; *Keyhole*, 4/60; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1963.)

3/1/41 And So to Death. (*Rex Stout's Mystery Monthly*, 12/46; *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 8/71; *13 Short Mystery Novels*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Martin H. Greenberg, 1984. All these reprintings are under the title "Nightmare.") (IWBIYS, as "Nightmare.") (NM, as "Nightmare.")

BAFFLING DETECTIVE MYSTERIES

3/43 The Death Rose. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/59, as "Dead Roses.")

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

7/36 One and a Half Murders. (NW.)

BLACK MASK

1/37 Shooting Going On. (*The Saint Detective Magazine*, 10/58.)

2/37 Murder on the Night Boat. (*Cop Cade*, ed. John Ball, 1978.)

5/37 I'll Never Play Detective Again. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 7/63.) (IISDBIW.)

6/37 Mimic Murder. (*The Saint Detective Magazine*, 7/58; *The Saint Mystery Library #13*, 3/60.)

9/37 Nellie from Zelli's.

10/37 Face Work. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/46; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1968; *Crime on Her Mind*, ed. Michele B. Slung, 1975; *The Great American Detective*, ed. William Kitteredge & Steven M. Krauzer, 1978. All these reprintings are under the title "Angel Face.") (SNM, as "One Night in New York.")

11/37 Cab, Mister? (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/50.)

12/37 Dusk to Dawn. (NW.)

1/38 After-Dinner Story. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/43; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1964; *Classic Stories of Crime and Detection*, ed. Jacques Barzun & Wendell Hertig Taylor, 1976; *Crimes and Clues*, ed. Stephan P. Clarke, 1978; *The Edgar Winners*, ed. Bill Pronzini, 1980.) (ADS.)

2/38 Dime a Dance. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Fall/41, under original title; *Murder by Experts*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1947; *Fourteen Great Detective Stories*, ed. Howard Haycraft, 1949; *Mystery Digest*, 9/58; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1968; *Masterpieces of Mystery, Vol. 12: Stories Not to Be Missed*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1978; *The Deadly Arts*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Marcia Muller, 1985. All these subsequent reprintings are under the title "The Dancing Detective.") (TDD, as "The Dancing Detective.")

7/39 Borrowed Crime. (BC.)

8/39 Men Must Die. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 4/47, and *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1969, as "Steps Going Up.") (DMB, as "Guillotine.") (V, as "Guillotine.") (TFCW, as "Steps Going Up.")

9/39 Crime by the Forelock.

0/39 Collared. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 7/49; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1963.) (SOTP.) (SNM, as "One Night in Chicago.")

2/39 Through a Dead Man's Eye. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/51; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1964.) (BSW.)

4/40 Post Mortem. (*The Second Mystery Companion*, ed. A.L. Furman, 1944; *Rex Stout's Mystery Monthly*, 6/46.) (Distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1946, as "Death Wins the Sweepstakes.") (RW&4SN.)

0/40 C-Jag. (*The Pocket Mystery Reader*, ed. Lee Wright, 1942, as "Cocaine"; distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1946, as "Cocaine"; *Mystery Digest*, 12/58, as "Dream of Death"; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/65, as "Just Enough to Cover a Thumbnail.")

4/41 Cool, Calm and Detected. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/56, as "The Absent-Minded Murder.")

5/42 Dormant Account. (Distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1942, as "Chance"; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/53, under original title.) (BC, as "Chance.")

7/42 Three Kills for One. (Distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1949, as "Double Jeopardy"; *Triple Detective*, Autumn/52, under original title; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/53, as "The Loophole.") (IISDBIW, as "Two Murders, One Crime.")

2/43 If the Dead Could Talk. (*The Mystery Companion*, ed. A.L. Furman, 1943; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 7/46; *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 4/64; *The Wickedest Show on Earth*, ed. Marcia Muller & Bill Pronzini, 1986.) (DMB.)

7/44 Picture Frame. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/54, as "Dead Shot.") (SNM, as "One Night in Hollywood.")

BREEZY STORIES

4/35 Spanish—And What Eyes!
6/35 Don't Fool Me!
8/35 Clip-Joint. (*College Life*, Winter/36.)
10/35 No Kick Coming.
11/35 Flower in His Buttonhole.
12/35 Annabelle Gets Across.
3/36 Pick Up the Pieces.
4/36 The Clock at the Astor.
7/36 His Name Was Jack.
1/37 Jimmy Had a Nickel.

5/37 Kidnapped!
7/37 The Girl Next Door.
10/37 I Knew Her When—.
1/39 The Invincibles.

CLUES DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

11/38 The Screaming Laugh. (*The Arbor House Treasury of Horror and the Supernatural*, ed. Bill Pronzini, Barry N. Malzberg & Martin H. Greenberg, 1981.) (NW.)

COLLEGE HUMOR

9/26 Honey Child.
1/27 Bread and Orchids.
8/27 Children of the Ritz: I.
9/27 Children of the Ritz: II.
10/27 Children of the Ritz: III.
11/27 Children of the Ritz: IV.
Note: This serial was published in book form as the 1927 novel *Children of the Ritz*.
8/28 Mother and Daughter.
2/29 Bluebeard's Thirteenth Wife.
1/30 Gay Music.
8/31 The Girl in the Moon.

COLLEGE LIFE

10/28 The Good Die Young.
5–7/34 The Next Is on Me.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

8/4/34 Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/58, and *Kill or Cure*, ed. Marcia Muller & Bill Pronzini, 1985, as "Hurting Much?") (SOTP, under original title.) (DAD, under original title.)
8/18/34 Walls That Hear You. (DAD.)
12/7/35 The Death of Me. (*Ellery Queen's Anthology #52: More Lost Ladies and Men*, ed. Eleanor Sullivan, 1985.) (DAD.)
12/14/35 The Showboat Murders. (DAD.)
1/11/36 Cigarette. (*Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 3/65.)
1/25/36 Change of Murder. (*Murder for the Millions*, ed. Frank Owen, 1946; *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 12/62.) (IISDBIW.) (RW&4SN.)

3/21/36	Blood in Your Eye.
4/4/36	The Mystery of the Blue Spot.
5/2/36	Johnny on the Spot. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 11/48.) (SOTP.) (AOD.)
5/16/36	Double Feature. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/55, as "The Most Exciting Show in Town.") (TFCW, as "The Most Exciting Show in Town.")
6/20/36	Nine Lives.
7/4/36	Dilemma of the Dead Lady. (TBR, as "Wardrobe Trunk.") (Note: Woolrich later adapted this story into a radio script, which was never performed but was published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/64, as "Working Is for Fools.")
8/8/36	The Night I Died. (Originally published as by Anonymous.) (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/50; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1965; *13 Ways to Dispose of a Body*, ed. Basil Davenport, 1966.) (SOTP.)
8/15/36	Murder on My Mind. (Revised version, *Five Detective Novels*, Spring/52, as "The Morning After Murder.") (Revised version, BSW, as "Morning After Murder.")
8/22/36	Bluebeard's Seventh Wife. (BSW.)
9/26/36	Murder in the Middle of New York.
10/10/36	Death in the Air. (NW.)
11/14/36	Afternoon of a Phony.
12/26/36	The Two Deaths of Barney Slabaugh. (Reprinted in same magazine, 3/51.)
1/23/37	The Corpse Next Door. (NW.)
2/27/37	Blue Is for Bravery. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/55, as "Invitation to Sudden Death.")
3/27/37	Round Trip to the Cemetery.
6/5/37	Wake Up with Death.
7/3/37	If I Should Die Before I Wake. (*Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 12/64; *The Saint Magazine*, 7/66.) (IISDBIW.)
7/17/37	Vision of Murder.
7/31/37	Somebody on the Phone. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 4/49; *These Will Chill You*, ed. Lee Wright & Richard G. Sheehan, 1967; *Ellery Queen's Minimysteries*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1969; *101 Mystery Stories*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Martin H. Greenberg, 1986.) (SOTP.) (TFCW.)
9/11/37	Murder Story. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/59, as "The Inside Story"; revised version distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1960, as "The Murderer's Story.") (ADS.)
9/25/37	You Bet Your Life. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/58, as "Don't Bet on Murder.")

10/9/37 The Lie. (Distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1949, as "Case of the Lying Son"; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/72.) (TBR.)

12/4/37 The Gun But Not the Hand.

2/19/38 Endicott's Girl. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/58; distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1958.)

3/12/38 I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes. (IWBIYS.)

4/16/38 The Cape Triangular. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/63.) (BC.)

6/4/38 Mystery in Room 913. (Distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1947; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/49; *Death Locked In*, ed. Douglas G. Greene & Robert C.S. Adey, 1987, as "The Room with Something Wrong.") (SOTP, as "The Room with Something Wrong.")

9/10/38 Detective William Brown. (BC.)

10/1/38 Three O'Clock. (*And the Darkness Falls*, ed. Boris Karloff, 1946; *The Avon Mystery Story Teller*, 1946; *Verdict*, 9/53.) (IWBIYS.) (NM.) (RW&4SN.)

1/7/39 Silhouette. (BSW.)

2/18/39 The Counterfeit Hat. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 10/61, as "The Singing Hat.") (BSW, as "The Hat.")

3/4/39 Those Who Kill. (*Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 4/66.) (Note: This story was later expanded into the 1942 novel *Phantom Lady*.)

2/17/40 Death in Duplicate. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/56, as "The Ice Pick Murders.")

6/22/40 Finger of Doom. (*Great American Detective Stories*, ed. Anthony Boucher, 1945, as "I Won't Take a Minute"; *Mysterious Traveler*, 3/52, as "I'll Just Be a Minute"; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 1/57, as "Wait for Me Downstairs.") (TFCW, as "I Won't Take a Minute.")

10/26/40 The Detective's Dilemma. (*The Saint Detective Magazine*, Spring/53; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 4/72, and *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Fall-Winter/76, as "Only One Grain More"; *Great Modern Police Stories*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Martin H. Greenberg, 1986.) (TDD.)

12/14/40 Murder Always Gathers Momentum. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/49, and *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Spring-Summer/71, as "Momentum"; reprinted in original magazine, 4/51, as "Murder Is a Snowball"; *The Saint Detective Magazine*, 7/54, as "Murder Gathers Momentum.") (SOTP, as "Momentum.") (RW&4SN, as "Momentum.")

2/8/41 He Looked Like Murder. (Distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1948, as "Accessory to Murder.") (TDD, as "Two Fellows in a Furnished Room.")

/15/41 Of Time and Murder. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/54, as "The Last Bus Home.") (Note: This story was later expanded into the 1944 novel *Deadline at Dawn*.)

5/3/41 Marihuana. (ADS.) (Separate publication as *Marihuana*, Dell 10¢ pb #11, 1951.)

/14/41 The Fatal Footlights. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 6/55, as "Death at the Burlesque"; distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1955, as "Death Along 42nd Street"; *The Deadly Arts*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Marcia Muller, 1985, as "Death at the Burlesque.")

Note: At this point the name of the magazine was changed to *Detective Fiction Magazine*.

5/42 Phantom Alibi: I.
6/42 Phantom Alibi: II.

Note: At this point the name of the magazine was changed to *Flynn's Detective Magazine*.

7/42 Phantom Alibi: III.
8/42 Phantom Alibi: IV.
9/42 Phantom Alibi: V.
10/42 Phantom Alibi: VI.

Note: This serial was published in book form as the 1942 novel *Phantom Lady*.

12/42 Havana Night. (Note: This story was later expanded into the 1944 novel *The Black Path of Fear*.)

Note: At this point the name of the magazine was changed to *Flynn's Detective Fiction Magazine*.

2/43 The Death Stone. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/46, as "The Earring"; distributed by King Features Syndicate, n.d., as "Double-Life"; *New Detective*, 11/50, as "The Blood Stone"; *The Saint Detective Magazine*, 11/55, under original title; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1967, as "The Earring.") (DMB, as "The Earring.")

4/43 The Death Diary. (*Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 2/63.)

8/43 Come Witness My Murder.

DETECTIVE TALES

7/41 The Customer's Always Right. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/44, and *Encore*, 9/45, as "The Fingernail"; *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 6/63, under original title.) (TDD, as "The Fingernail.")

9/42 Implacable Bequest. (NM, as "Bequest.")

DIME DETECTIVE

11/15/34 Preview of Death. (Revised version distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1955, as "Murder Before the Camera," and reprinted in *The Saint Magazine*, 7/67, as "Screen Test.") (Revised version in NM, as "Screen Test.") (Original version, under original title, in DAD.)

3/1/35 Murder in Wax. (DAD.) (Note: This story was later expanded into the 1943 novel *The Black Angel*.)

4/1/35 The Body Upstairs. (DAD.)

5/1/35 Kiss of the Cobra. (FSCW.) (DAD.)

7/1/35 Red Liberty. (Revised version distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1957, and reprinted in *Manhattan Mysteries*, ed. Bill Pronzini, Carol-Lynn Rössel Waugh & Martin H. Greenberg, 1987, as "The Corpse in the Statue of Liberty.") (Original version reprinted in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 7/75, as "Mystery in the Statue of Liberty.") (Revised version in V, as "The Corpse in the Statue of Liberty.") (Original version, under original title, in DAD.)

9/35 The Corpse and the Kid. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 10/49, as "Blind Date.") (SOTP, as "Boy with Body.") (DAD, under original title.)

12/35 Dead on Her Feet. (NW.) (DAD.)

4/36 The Living Lie Down with the Dead. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/55, as "One Night To Be Dead Sure Of"; *The Arbor House Treasury of Detective and Mystery Stories from the Great Pulps*, ed. Bill Pronzini, 1983.) (BDWD.)

6/37 Blind Date with Death. (BDWD.)

8/37 Murder at the Automat. (*The World of Mystery Fiction*, ed. Elliot Gilbert, 1978; *Tantalizing Locked Room Mysteries*, ed. Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh & Martin H. Greenberg, 1982.) (NW.)

10/37 Stuck with Murder. (ETWY, as "Stuck.")

5/38 Short Order Kill. (ETWY, as "Flat Tire.")

5/39 The Case of the Killer-Diller.

7/39 Charlie Won't Be Home Tonight. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 9/51; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1966.) (ETWY.)

9/39 The Case of the Talking Eyes. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 4/67, as "The Talking Eyes." (ETWY, as "Eyes That Watch You.")

6/40 Meet Me by the Mannequin. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/55; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/82.) (AOD.)

9/40 Flowers from the Dead. (*The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 4/62.) (BDWD.)

1/40 The Riddle of the Redeemed Dips. (BDWD.)

3/41 U, As in Murder. (ETWY, as "Murder with a U.")

5/41 The Case of the Maladroit Manicurist. (BDWD.)

6/41 Crazy House. (BDWD.)

0/41 Murder at Mother's Knee. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/54, as "Something That Happened in Our House"; distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1955, as "Murder Does Its Homework"; *Dark Lessons*, ed. Marcia Muller & Bill Pronzini, 1985, under original title.) (AOD.)

2/42 It Had to Be Murder. (*All Mystery*, 10–12/50, as "Rear Window"; *The Saint Detective Magazine*, Winter/53, under original title; *A Treasury of Great Mysteries*, ed. Howard Haycraft & John Beecroft, 1957, as "Rear Window"; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/69, as "Rear Window"; *Crimes and Clues*, ed. Stephan P. Clarke, 1978, as "Rear Window"; *The Mystery Hall of Fame*, ed. Bill Pronzini, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh, 1984, as "Rear Window"; *Famous Detectives*, ed. Virginia S. Reiser & Mary C. Allen, 1984, as "Rear Window"; *Ellery Queen's Anthology #56: Bad Scenes*, ed. Eleanor Sullivan, 1987, as "Rear Window.") (ADS, as "Rear Window.") (RW&4SN, as "Rear Window.")

9/42 Orphan Ice. (*Murder for the Millions*, ed. Frank Owen, 1946, as "The Orphan Diamond.")

2/42 The Hopeless Defense of Mrs. Dellford. (Revised version, *Manhunt*, 1/58, as "The Town Says Murder.") (Revised version in V, as "That New York Woman.")

1/43 The Body in Grant's Tomb. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/48; distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1949, as "The Case of the Body in Grant's Tomb"; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Fall-Winter/74.)

3/43 If the Shoe Fits. (BDWD.)

5/43 Mind Over Murder. (IISDBIW, as "A Death Is Caused.") (AOD, under original title.)

8/43 Leg Man. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 5/45; *The Fireside Mystery Book*, ed. Frank Owen, 1947; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1967.) (TDD.) (BDWD.)

9/43 Death on Delivery.

3/44 What the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/45, as "The Mathematics of Murder"; *Murder for the Millions*, ed. Frank Owen, 194 and *Rex Stout's Mystery Monthly*, 5/47, as "The Body of Well-Dressed Woman.") (TDD, as "Fur Jacket.")

DIME MYSTERY

7/35 Dark Melody of Madness. (*Whodunit? Houdini?*, ed. Ott Penzler, 1976, as "Papa Benjamin"; *Feast of Fear*, ed Vic Ghidalia, 1977, as "Music from the Dark"; *Voodoo!* ed. Bill Pronzini, 1980, as "Papa Benjamin"; *Cults!*, ed Charles G. Waugh & Martin H. Greenberg, 1983, a "Music from the Dark.") (IISDBIW, as "Papa Benjamin.") (BTN, as "Music from the Dark.") (FSCW, unde original title.) (DAD, under original title.)

6/37 Graves for the Living. (NW.) (VH.)

DOUBLE DETECTIVE

11/37 Waltz. (AOD.)

1/38 You Take Ballistics. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 2/47; *Verdict*, 8/53.) (DMB.)

2/38 Never Kick a Dick.

3/38 Hot Towel. (TBR.)

8/38 The Woman's Touch.

10/38 I Hereby Bequeath.

11/38 I.O.U.—One Life. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 10/54, as "Debt of Honor"; *Keyhole*, 6/60, as "I.O.U.") (NM, as "I.O.U.") (TFCW, as "Debt of Honor.")

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

9/58 The Penny-a-Worder. (*The Saint Magazine*, 3/67, as "Pulp Writer"; *Chapter and Hearse*, ed. Marcia Muller & Bill Pronzini, 1985, under original title.) (NW, under original title.)

3/59 Blonde Beauty Slain. (*Ellery Queen's 14th Mystery Annual*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1959; *Twentieth Century Detective Stories*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1964; *Masterpieces of Mystery, Vol. 9: The Fifties*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1978.)

1/62 Money Talks.

4/62 One Drop of Blood. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Mix*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1963; *Bizarre*, 10/65; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 11/69; *The Golden 13*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1970.) (TFCW.)

3/64 Working Is for Fools. (Note: This is a recasting of the 1936 story "Dilemma of the Dead Lady" in the form of a radio script.)

4/64 Steps . . . Coming Near. (*The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 7/65, as "The Jazz Record"; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1969, as "Steps Coming Near.")

6/64 When Love Turns. (TDSL, as "Je t'Aime.")

12/64 Murder After Death. (*Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Spring-Summer/72; *X Marks the Plot*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1977.)

7/66 It Only Takes a Minute to Die. (*Ellery Queen's All-Star Lineup*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1967; *Masterpieces of Mystery, Vol. 16: More from the Sixties*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1979.)

6/67 Divorce—New York Style: I.

7/67 Divorce—New York Style: II.

Note: The entire story was reprinted in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Parade*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1968.

5/68 For the Rest of Her Life. (*Ellery Queen's Murder Menu*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1969; *Masterpieces of Mystery, Vol. II: The Sixties*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1978.) (AOD.)

12/70 New York Blues. (*Ellery Queen's Headliners*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1971; *Masterpieces of Mystery, Vol. 17: The Seventies*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1979; *Manhattan Mysteries*, ed. Bill Pronzini, Carol-Lynn Rössel Waugh & Martin H. Greenberg, 1987.)

ESCAPADE

4/68 Warrant of Arrest. (An intermediate chapter from Woolrich's unfinished novel *The Loser*.)

FANTASTIC

1–12/52 The Moon of Montezuma. (Complete story reprinted in *Merchants of Menace*, ed. Hillary Waugh, 1969, and in *House Shudders*, ed. Martin H. Greenberg & Charles G. Waugh, 1987.) (Abridged version of first half of story in V.) (Complete story in BTN.) (Complete story in FSCW.)

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

3/45 The Girl Who Married Royalty.

HORROR STORIES

8–9/39 Vampire's Honeymoon. (Revised version in BTN, as "My Lips Destroy.") (Original version, under original title, in VH.)

ILLUSTRATED LOVE

11/30 Cinderella Magic.
3/32 Orchids and Overalls.
10/32 Women Are Funny.

JUSTICE

1/56 The Black Bargain. (*The Saint Mystery Magazine,* 10/63, as "The Night of February 17, 1924.") (Note: This story was included as a chapter in the 1958 episodic novel *Hotel Room.*)

KNIGHT

The Idol with the Clay Bottom. (TDSL.) ?/65.

LIBERTY

10/11/30 Soda-Fountain Saga. (Revised version, *The Saint Mystery Magazine,* 3/60, as "Soda Fountain.")

LIVE GIRL STORIES

11/28 Hollywood Bound: I.
12/28 Hollywood Bound: II.
1/29 Hollywood Bound: III.
2/29 Hollywood Bound: IV.
3/29 Hollywood Bound: V.

Note: This serial was published in book form as the 1929 novel *Times Square.*

THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

12/58 Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life. (BTN.) (Note: This story is in the form of a television script. A later version in prose is included in TDSL, as "Somebody Else's Life.")

McCLURE'S

10/26 Dance It Off!
8/27 The Gate Crasher.
10/27 The Drugstore Cowboy.

MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE

8/45 Four Bars of Yankee Doodle. (Note: This novelette was later expanded into the 1951 novel *Strangler's Serenade*.)
8/45 The Man Upstairs. (*Rex Stout's Mystery Monthly*, 2/46; *Murder for the Millions*, ed. Frank Owen, 1946.) (IISDBIW.) (TFCW.)
11/45 Silent As the Grave. (Abridged version in TDD.)
4/46 The Light in the Window. (TDD.)
3/47 The Boy Cried Murder. (*The Saint Detective Magazine*, 9/54, under original title; *Child's Ploy*, ed. Marcia Muller & Bill Pronzini, 1984, as "Fire Escape"; *Murder in the First Reel*, ed. Bill Pronzini, Charles G. Waugh & Martin H. Greenberg, 1985, under original title.) (DMB, as "Fire Escape.")
Fall/47 One Night in Barcelona. (NW.)

POCKET DETECTIVE

1/37 The Heavy Sugar. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 12/50.)
3/37 The Humming Bird Comes Home. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/50, under original title; *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, 2/64, and *The Saint Magazine Reader*, ed. Leslie Charteris & Hans Stefan Santesson, 1966, as "The Humming Bird.") (BSW, under original title.) (TFCW, under original title.)
4/37 Death in Round Three. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 7/51.)

THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

10/62 The Poker Player's Wife. (Revised version in TDSL.)
5/63 Story To Be Whispered. (Revised version in TDSL.)
Note: At this point the name of the magazine was changed to *The Saint Magazine*.
10/66 Mannequin.
9/67 Intent to Kill.

SATURDAY EVENING POST

Summer/71 The Talent.

SERENADE

3/34 Between the Acts.
3/34 Insult. (As by Ted Brooks.)
6/34 The Very First Breakfast.

SHADOW MYSTERY MAGAZINE

4–5/47 Death Escapes the Eye. (Revised version in V, as "Murder, Obliquely.") (Original version, under original title, in AOD.)
12/47–1/48 Death Between Dances. (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 10/78; *Ellery Queen's Anthology #45: Eyewitnesses*, ed. Ellery Queen, 1982.)

STORY MAGAZINE

4/36 The Night Reveals. (*Fear and Trembling*, ed. Alfred Hitchcock, 1948; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 8/48; *Story Jubilee* ed. Whit Burnett, 1965; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, Mid-Year 1970.) (ADS.) (TFCW.)
10/37 Goodbye, New York. (*The Story Pocket Book*, ed. Whit Burnett, 1944; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 3/53; *Ellery Queen's Anthology*, 1969.) (V, as "Don't Wait Up for Me Tonight.")

STRANGE DETECTIVE MYSTERIES

7–8/39 The Street of Jungle Death. (VH.) (Note: This novelette was later expanded into the 1942 novel *Black Alibi*.)

STREET & SMITH'S DETECTIVE STORY

2/39 The Dog with the Wooden Leg. (TBR.)
8/39 The Book That Squealed. (*The Fourth Mystery Companion*, ed. A.L. Furman, 1946, as "Library Book"; *Women's Wiles*, ed. Michele B. Slung, 1979, and *Women Sleuths*, ed. Martin H. Greenberg & Bill Pronzini, 1985, under original title.) (AOD.)

1/39 You'll Never See Me Again. (*Detective Story Annual*, 1941.) (Published separately as *You'll Never See Me Again*, Dell 10¢ pb #26, 1951.) (NW.)
5/40 One Last Night. (Revised version distributed by King Features Syndicate, 1956, as "Murder in the Dark Blue Night.") (Revised version in NM, as "I'll Take You Home, Kathleen.")
9/40 The Red Tide. (Revised version, *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, 12/58, as "Last Night a Man Died.") (Revised version in IWBIYS, as "Last Night.") (Original version, under original title, in NW.)
4/45 Dipped in Blood. (*The Fireside Mystery Book*, ed. Frank Owen, 1947, as "Fountain Pen"; *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, 10/64, as "Adventures of a Fountain Pen.") (DMB, as "Fountain Pen.") (TFCW, as "Adventures of a Fountain Pen.")

SWEETHEART STORIES

8/38 Deserted!: I.
9/38 Deserted!: II.
10/38 Deserted!: III.
11/38 Deserted!: IV.

TEN DETECTIVE ACES

9/37 Taxi Dance Murder.

THRILLING MYSTERY

1/36 Baal's Daughter.

TODAY'S WOMAN

4/46 They Call Me Patrice. (Note: This novelette was later expanded into the 1948 novel *I Married A Dead Man*.)

V. SHORT STORIES FIRST PUBLISHED IN COLLECTIONS OF WOOLRICH'S FICTION

AFTER-DINNER STORY (1944)

An Apple a Day.

THE BLUE RIBBON (1949)

The Blue Ribbon. (*World's Greatest Boxing Stories*, ed. Harold U. Ribalow, 1952; *In the Ring*, ed. Martin H. Greenberg, 1987.)
Husband.

HOTEL ROOM (1958)

The Night of June 20, 1896.
The Night of April 6, 1917.
The Night of November 11, 1918.
The Night of October 24, 1929.
The Night of. . . .
The Night of September 30, 1957.

BEYOND THE NIGHT (1959)

The Number's Up. (Abridged version, *For Men Only*, 7/61, as "Number's Up.")

THE DARK SIDE OF LOVE (1965)

The Clean Fight.
I'm Ashamed.
Too Nice a Day to Die. (*Bizarre*, 1/66.)

NIGHTWEBS (1971)

Life Is Weird Sometimes. (The first chapter of Woolrich's unfinished novel *The Loser*.)

VI. SHORT STORIES FIRST PUBLISHED IN ANTHOLOGIES

The Release. (In *With Malice Toward All*, ed. Robert L. Fish, 1968.) (Reprinted in *101 Mystery Stories*, ed. Bill Pronzini & Martin H. Greenberg, 1986.) (The last chapter of Woolrich's unfinished novel *The Loser*.)

VII. ARTICLES

COLLEGE HUMOR

6/29 We're Just a Lot of Smart Alecks.

SMART SET

9/28 Girls, We're Wise to You.
11/28 I Know Your Line.

CORNELL WOOLRICH AS ADAPTED FOR MOVIES: CHRONOLOGY AND CREDITS

I. FILMS MADE IN ENGLISH

CHILDREN OF THE RITZ (First National, 1929)

Producer	Richard A. Rowland
Photographer	James Van Trees
Film Editor	LeRoy Stone
Screenplay	Adelaide Heilbron
Titles	Paul Perez
Woolrich Source	*Children of the Ritz* (1927)
Director	John Francis Dillon

Angela Pennington	Dorothy Mackaill
Dewey Haines	Jack Mulhall
Gil Pennington	James Ford
Mr. Pennington	Richard Carlyle
Mrs. Pennington	Evelyn Hall
Lyle Pennington	Kathryn McGuire
The Butler	Frank Crayne
Jerry Wilder	Ed Burns
Margie Haines	Doris Dawson
Mrs. Haines	Aggie Herring
Gaffney	Lee Moran

MANHATTAN LOVE SONG (Monogram, 1934)

Producer	Trem Carr
Photographer	Robert Plank
Film Editor	Carl Pierson
Screenplay	Leonard Fields, David Silverste
Woolrich Source	*Manhattan Love Song* (1932)
Director	Leonard Fields

Williams	Robert Armstrong
Jerry Stewart	Dixie Lee
Carol Stewart	Helen Flint
Garrett Weatherby	Franklin Pangborn
Annette	Nydia Westman
Phineas Jones	Harold Waldridge
Pancake Annie	Cecil Cunningham
Joe Thomas	Harrison Green
Gustave	Herman Bing

CONVICTED (Columbia, 1938)

Producer	Kenneth J. Bishop
Photographer	George Meehan
Film Editor	William Austin
Music Director	Morris Stoloff
Screenplay	Edgar Edwards
Woolrich Source	"Face Work" (*Black Mask,* October 1937)
Director	Leon Barsha

Burns	Charles Quigley
Jerry Wheeler	Rita Hayworth
Milton Militis	Marc Lawrence
Kane	George McKay
Mary Allen	Doreen McGregor
Cobble-Puss Coley	Bill Irving
Berger	Eddie Laughton
Chick Wheeler	Edgar Edwards
Ruby Rose	Phyllis Clare
Rocco	Bob Rideout
Pal	Michael Heppell
Aggie	Noel Cusack

Frankie	Grant MacDonald
District Attorney	Don Douglas

STREET OF CHANCE (Paramount, 1942)

Producer	Sol C. Siegel
Associate Producer	Burt Kelly
Photographer	Theodor Sparkuhl
Film Editor	Arthur Schmidt
Music	David Buttolph
Screenplay	Garrett Fort
Woolrich Source	*The Black Curtain* (1941)
Director	Jack Hively

Frank Thompson	Burgess Meredith
Ruth Dillon	Claire Trevor
Virginia Thompson	Louise Platt
Joe Marucci	Sheldon Leonard
Alma Diedrich	Frieda Inescort
Bill Diedrich	Jerome Cowan
Grandma Diedrich	Adeline de Walt Reynolds
Sheriff Lew Stebbins	Arthur Loft
Burke	Clancy Cooper
Schoeder	Paul Phillips
Intern	Keith Richards
Miss Peabody	Ann Doran
Policeman Ryan	Cliff Clark
District Attorney Stillwell	Edwin Maxwell

THE LEOPARD MAN (RKO, 1943)

Producer	Val Lewton
Photographer	Robert De Grasse
Film Editor	Mark Robson
Music Score	Roy Webb
Music Director	Constantin Bakaleinikoff
Screenplay	Ardel Wray
Additional Dialogue	Edward Dein
Woolrich Source	*Black Alibi* (1942)
Director	Jacques Tourneur

Jerry Manning	Dennis O'Keefe
Clo-Clo	Margo

Kiki Walker	Jean Brooks
Maria	Isabel Jewell
Dr. Galbraith	James Bell
Teresa Delgado	Margaret Landry
Charlie How-Come	Abner Biberman
Consuelo Contreras	Tula Parma
Chief of Police Robles	Ben Bard
Raul Belmonte	Richard Martin

PHANTOM LADY (Universal, 1944)

Associate Producer	Joan Harrison
Photographer	Woody Bredell
Film Editor	Arthur Hilton
Music Director	Hans J. Salter
Screenplay	Bernard Schoenfeld
Woolrich Source	*Phantom Lady* (1942)
Director	Robert Siodmak
Jack Marlow	Franchot Tone
Carol "Kansas" Richman	Ella Raines
Scott Henderson	Alan Curtis
Estela Monteiro	Aurora
Inspector Burgess	Thomas Gomez
Ann Terry	Fay Helm
Cliff March	Elisha Cook Jr.
Bartender	Andrew Tombes
Detective	Regis Toomey
Detective	Joseph Crehan
Kettisha	Doris Lloyd
Dr. Chase	Virginia Brissac
District Attorney	Milburn Stone

THE MARK OF THE WHISTLER (Columbia, 1944)

Producer	Rudolph C. Flothow
Photographer	George Meehan
Film Editor	Reg T. Browne
Whistler Musical Theme	Wilbur Hatch
Screenplay	George Bricker
Woolrich Source	"Dormant Account" (*Black Mask*, May 1942)
Director	William Castle

Lee Nugent	Richard Dix
Patricia Henley	Janis Carter
Joe Sorsby	Porter Hall
Limpy Smith	Paul Guilfoyle
Eddie Donnelly	John Calvert
Perry Donnelly	Matt Willis

DEADLINE AT DAWN (RKO, 1946)

Producer	Adrian Scott
Photographer	Nicholas Musuraca
Film Editor	Roland Gross
Music Score	Hanns Eisler
Music Director	Constantin Bakaleinikoff
Screenplay	Clifford Odets
Woolrich Source	*Deadline at Dawn* (1944)
Director	Harold Clurman

June Goth	Susan Hayward
Gus	Paul Lukas
Alex Winkley	Bill Williams
Bartelli	Joseph Calleia
Helen Robinson	Osa Massen
Edna Bartelli	Lola Lane
Lester Brady	Jerome Cowan
Sleepy Parsons	Marvin Miller
Collarless Man	Roman Bohnen
Man with Gloves	Steven Geray
Babe Dooley	Joe Sawyer
Mrs. Raymond	Constance Worth
Lt. Kane	Joseph Crehan

BLACK ANGEL (Universal, 1946)

Producers	Roy William Neill, Tom McKnight
Photographer	Paul Ivano
Film Editor	Saul A. Goodkind
Music Score	Frank Skinner
Screenplay	Roy Chanslor
Woolrich Source	*The Black Angel* (1943)
Director	Roy William Neill

Martin Blair	Dan Duryea
Catherine Bennett	June Vincent
Marko	Peter Lorre
Capt. Flood	Broderick Crawford
Mavis Marlowe	Constance Dowling
Joe	Wallace Ford
Jake	Hobart Cavanaugh
Lucky	Freddie Steele
Kirk Bennett	John Phillips
Bartender	Ben Bard
Dr. Courtney	Junius Matthews

THE CHASE (United Artists, 1946)

Producer	Seymour Nebenzal
Associate Producer	Eugene Frenke
Photographer	Franz F. Planer
Film Editor	Edward Mann
Music Score	Michel Michelet
Music Director	Heinz Roemheld
Screenplay	Philip Yordan
Woolrich Source	*The Black Path of Fear* (1944)
Director	Arthur Ripley

Chuck Scott	Robert Cummings
Lorna Roman	Michele Morgan
Gino	Peter Lorre
Eddie Roman	Steve Cochran
Emmerick Johnson	Lloyd Corrigan
Commander Davidson	Jack Holt
Fats	Don Wilson
Acosta	Alexis Minotis
Madame Chin	Nina Koschetz
Midnight	Yolanda Lacca
Job	James Westerfield
The Killer	Jimmy Ames
Manicurist	Shirley O'Hara

FALL GUY (Monogram, 1947)

Producer	Walter Mirisch
Photographer	Mack Stengler
Film Editor	William Austin
Music Director	Edward J. Kay

Screenplay	Jerry Warner
Additional Dialogue	John O'Dea
Woolrich Source	"C-Jag" (*Black Mask*, October 1940)
Director	Reginald LeBorg
Tom Cochrane	Clifford Penn
Lois Walters	Teala Loring
Mac McClane	Robert Armstrong
Marie	Virginia Dale
Joe	Elisha Cook, Jr.
Inspector Shannon	Douglas Fowley
Uncle Jim Grosset	Charles Arnt
Taylor	Harry Strang

THE GUILTY (Monogram, 1947)

Producer	Jack Wrather
Associate Producer	James C. Jordan
Photographer	Henry Sharp
Film Editor	Jodie Copelan
Music Score	Rudy Schrager
Music Director	David Chudnow
Screenplay	Robert R. Presnell Sr.
Woolrich Source	"He Looked Like Murder" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, Feb. 8, 1941)
Director	John Reinhardt
Estelle Mitchell	Bonita Granville
Linda Mitchell	Bonita Granville
Mike Carr	Don Castle
Johnny Dixon	Wally Cassell
Detective Heller	Regis Toomey
Alex Tremholt	John Litel
Mrs. Mitchell	Ruth Robinson
Tim McGinnis	Thomas Jackson
Jake	Oliver Blake
The Whistler	Caroline Andrews

FEAR IN THE NIGHT (Paramount, 1947)

Producers	William H. Pine, William C. Thomas
Associate Producer	L.B. Merman

Photographer	Jack Greenhalgh
Film Editor	Howard Smith
Music Score	Rudy Schrager
Screenplay	Maxwell Shane
Woolrich Source	"And So to Death" (*Argosy*, March 1, 1941)
Director	Maxwell Shane

Cliff Herlihy	Paul Kelly
Vince Grayson	DeForest Kelley
Lil Herlihy	Ann Doran
Betty Winters	Kay Scott
Capt. Warner	Charles Victor
Lewis Belknap	Robert Emmett Keane
Torrence	Jeff York
Mrs. Belknap	Janet Warren
Bob Clune	Michael Harvey
Mr. Bilyou	John Harmon

THE RETURN OF THE WHISTLER (Columbia, 1948)

Producer	Rudolph C. Flothow
Photographer	Philip Tannura
Film Editor	Dwight Caldwell
Whistler Musical Theme	Wilbur Hatch
Music Director	Mischa Bakaleinikoff
Screenplay	Edward Bock, Maurice Tombragel
Woolrich Source	"All at Once, No Alice" (*Argosy*, March 2, 1940)
Director	D. Ross Lederman

Ted Nichols	Michael Duane
Alice Duprez	Lenore Aubert
Gaylord Traynor	Richard Lane
Charlie	James Cardwell
Mrs. Barclay	Ann Shoemaker
Mrs. Hulskamp	Sarah Padden
Dr. Grantland	Wilton Graff
Jeff Anderson	Olin Howlin
Sam	Eddy Waller
Arnold Barclay	Trevor Bardette
Sybil Barclay	Ann Doran
Hart	Robert Emmett Keane
Capt. Griggs	Edgar Dearing

I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES (Monogram, 1948)

Producer	Walter Mirisch
Photographer	Mack Stengler
Film Editor	Roy Livingston
Music Score	Edward J. Kay
Screenplay	Steve Fisher
Woolrich Source	"I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 12, 1938)
Director	William Nigh
Tom	Don Castle
Ann	Elyse Knox
Judd	Regis Toomey
Inspector Stevens	Charles D. Brown
First Detective	Rory Mallinson
Kosloff	Robert Lowell
Second Detective	Bill Kennedy

NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES (Paramount, 1948)

Producer	Endre Bohem
Photographer	John F. Seitz
Film Editor	Eda Warren
Music Score	Victor Young
Screenplay	Barré Lyndon, Jonathan Latimer
Woolrich Source	*Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1945)
Director	John Farrow
John Triton	Edward G. Robinson
Jean Courtland	Gail Russell
Elliott Carson	John Lund
Jenny	Virginia Bruce
Lt. Shawn	William Demarest
Peter Vinson	Richard Webb
Whitney Courtland	Jerome Cowan
Dr. Walters	Onslow Stevens
Mr. Gilman	John Alexander
Melville Weston	Roman Bohnen
Mr. Myers	Luis Van Rooten

THE WINDOW (RKO, 1949)

Producer	Frederic Ullman Jr.
Photographer	William Steiner
Film Editor	Frederic Knudtson
Music Score	Roy Webb
Music Director	Constantin Bakaleinikoff
Screenplay	Mel Dinelli
Woolrich Source	"The Boy Cried Murder" (*Myster Book Magazine,* March 1947)
Director	Ted Tetzlaff

Tommy Woodry	Bobby Driscoll
Mrs. Woodry	Barbara Hale
Mr. Woodry	Arthur Kennedy
Joe Kellerson	Paul Stewart
Mrs. Kellerson	Ruth Roman
Ross	Anthony Ross
Drunken Seaman	Richard Benedict
Stranger on Street	Jim Nolan
Man	Ken Terrell

NO MAN OF HER OWN (Paramount, 1950)

Producer	Richard Maibaum
Photographer	Daniel L. Fapp
Film Editor	Alma Macrorie
Music Score	Hugo Friedhofer
Screenplay	Sally Benson, Catherine Turney
Woolrich Source	*I Married a Dead Man* (1948)
Director	Mitchell Leisen

Helen Ferguson	Barbara Stanwyck
Bill Harkness	John Lund
Mrs. Harkness	Jane Cowl
Patrice Harkness	Phyllis Thaxter
Stephen Morley	Lyle Bettger
Mr. Harkness	Henry O'Neill
Hugh Harkness	Richard Denning
Blonde	Carole Mathews
Ty Winthrop	Harry Antrim
Rosalie Baker	Catherine Craig
Josie	Esther Dale

Plainclothesman	Milburn Stone
Dr. Parker	Griff Barnett

REAR WINDOW (Paramount, 1954)

Producer	Alfred Hitchcock
Photographer	Robert Burks
Film Editor	George Tomasini
Music Score	Franz Waxman
Screenplay	John Michael Hayes
Woolrich Source	"It Had to Be Murder" (*Dime Detective*, February 1942)
Director	Alfred Hitchcock
L.B. Jeffries	James Stewart
Lisa Fremont	Grace Kelly
Tom Doyle	Wendell Corey
Stella	Thelma Ritter
Lars Thorwald	Raymond Burr
Miss Lonelyhearts	Judith Evelyn
Composer	Ross Bagdasarian
Miss Torso	Georgine Darcy
Woman with Dog	Sara Berner
Man with Dog	Frank Cady
Sculptress	Jesslyn Fax
Newlywed	Rand Harper
Mrs. Thorwald	Irene Winston
Woman	Havis Davenport

NIGHTMARE (United Artists, 1956)

Producers	William C. Pine, William H. Thomas
Photographer	Joseph Biroc
Film Editor	George Gittens
Music Score	Herschel Burke Gilbert
Screenplay	Maxwell Shane
Woolrich Source	"And So to Death" (*Argosy*, March 1, 1941)
Director	Maxwell Shane
René Bressard	Edward G. Robinson
Stan Grayson	Kevin McCarthy

Gina	Connie Russell
Sue	Virginia Christine
Torrence	Rhys Williams
Belknap	Gage Clarke
Madge	Marian Carr
Warner	Barry Atwater
Louie Simes	Meade "Lux" Lewis
Jazz Musicians	Billy May and his orchestra

THE BOY CRIED MURDER (Universal, 1966)

Producer	Philip N. Krasne
Photographer	Milorad M. Markovic
Film Editor	Milanka Nanovic
Music Score	Martin Slavin
Screenplay	Robin Estridge
Woolrich Source	"The Boy Cried Murder" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, March 1947)
Director	George Breakston
Clare	Veronica Hurst
Tom	Phil Brown
Jonathan	Fraser "Fizz" MacIntosh
Mike	Tim Barrett
Suzy	Beba Loncar
Col. Wetherall	Edward Steel
Mrs. Wetherall	Anita Sharpe-Bolster
Police Officer	Alex MacIntosh

UNION CITY (Kinesis Ltd., 1979)

Producer	Graham Belin
Associate Producer	Ron Mutz
Photographer	Edward Lachman
Film Editors	Eric Albertson, Lana Tokel, J. Michaels
Music Score	Chris Stein
Screenplay	Mark Reichert
Woolrich Source	"The Corpse Next Door" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, Jan. 23, 1937)
Director	Mark Reichert

Lillian	Deborah Harry
Harlan	Dennis Lipscomb
Longacre	Everett McGill
Contessa	Irina Maleeva
Jeanette	Pat Benatar
Vagrant	Sam McMurray
Evelyn	Terina Lewis
Alphonse	Tony Azito
Ludendorff	Paul Andor
Man in Taxi	Taylor Mead
Woman in Taxi	Cynthia Crisp
Cabbie	Charles Rydell

CLOAK & DAGGER (Universal, 1984)

Producer	Allan Carr
Photographer	Victor J. Kemper
Film Editor	Andrew London
Music Score	Brian May
Screenplay	Tom Holland
Woolrich Source	"The Boy Cried Murder" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, March 1947)
Director	Richard Franklin

Davey Osborne	Henry Thomas
Hal Osborne/Jack Flack	Dabney Coleman
Rice	Michael Murphy
Kim Gardener	Christina Nigra
George MacCreedy	John McIntire
Eunice MacCreedy	Jeanette Nolan
Alverez	Eloy Casados
Haverman	Tim Rossovich
Morris	Bill Forsythe
Lt. Fleming	Robert DoQui
Marilyn Gardener	Shelby Leverington
Airport Security Chief	Linden Chiles

II. FILMS MADE IN OTHER LANGUAGES (incomplete list)

EL PENDIENTE (Argentina, 1951)

Director	León Klimovsky
Screenplay	Ulyses Petit de Murat, Samuel Eichelbaum

Woolrich Source	"The Death Stone" (*Flynn's Detective Fiction Magazine*, formerl *Detective Fiction Weekly*, February 1943)

Players: Mirtha Legrand, Jose Cibrián, Francisco de Paula, Hécto Calcaño, Raúl del Valle.

SI MUERO ANTES DE DESPERTAR (Argentina, 1952)

Director	Carlos Hugo Christensen
Screenplay	Alejandro Casona
Woolrich Source	"If I Should Die Before I Wake" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 3, 1937)

Players: Néstor Lavarce, Floren Delbene, Blanca del Prado, Homero Cárpena, Maria Angélica Troncoso.

NO ABRAS NUNCA ESA PUERTA (Argentina, 1952)

Director	Carlos Hugo Christensen
Screenplay	Alejandro Casona
Woolrich Sources	"Somebody on the Phone" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 1, 1937) and "The Humming Bird Comes Home" (*Pocket Detective*, March 1937)

Players: Angel Magaña, Roberto Escalada, Reneè Dumas, Norma Giménez, Nicolás Fregues.

OBSESSION (Gibé-France, 1954)

Producer	?
Photographer	Pierre Montazel
Film Editor	James Cuenet
Music Score	Paul Miszaki
Screenplay	Antoine Blondin, Roland Laudenbach, Jean Delannoy
Woolrich Sources	"If the Dead Could Talk" (*Black Mask*, February 1943) and

	"Silent As the Grave" (*Mystery Book Magazine*, November 1945)
Director	Jean Delannoy

Helene	Michele Morgan
Aldo	Raf Vallone
Alex	Jean Gaven
Arlette	Marthe Mercadier
Louis	Olivier Hussenot
Inspector	Robert Dalban
Lawyer	Jacques Castelot

ESCAPADE (Pathé-France, 1957)

Producer	Christina Gouze-Renal
Photographer	Pierre Petit
Film Editor	Raymond Lamy
Music Score	Michel Emmer
Screenplay	Marcel Achard
Adaptation	Albert Valentin
Woolrich Source	"Cinderella and the Mob" (*Argosy*, June 23, 1940)
Director	Ralph Habib

Raphael	Louis Jourdan
Yvette	Dany Carrel
Philippe	Roger Hanin
	Lise Delamare
	Jean-Loup Philippe
	Margaret Remy
	Felix Martin

AH BAKUDAN (Toho-Japan, 1964)

Producer	Tomoyuki Tanaka
Photographer	Shinsaku Uno
Film Editor	Yoshitami Kuroiwa
Music Score	Masaru Sato
Screenplay	Kihachi Okamoto
Woolrich Source	"Dipped in Blood" (*Street & Smith's Detective Story*, April 1945)
Director	Kihachi Okamoto

Daimyo Daisaku	Yunosuke Ito
Daimyo Kensaku	Tadashi Takahashi
Daimyo Umeko	Fubuki Koshiji
Tanoue Taro	Hideo Sunazaka
Yato Yasaburo	Ichiro Nakatani
Shiino Takezo	Ikio Sawamara

SROK ISTEKAET NA RASSVETE (Gruziafilm-USSR, 1966)

Directors	Nelli Nenova & Gennady Pulaja
Screenplay	Nelli Nenova & Gennady Pulaja
Woolrich Source	*Deadline At Dawn* (1944)

Players: Adriadna Chenguelaya (as Bricky Coleman), Merabe Tavadze (as Tony Williams).

YORU NO WANA (Daiei-Japan, 1967)

Producer	?
Photographer	Joji Ohara
Film Editor	Shoji Sekiguchi
Music Score	Sei Ikeno
Screenplay	Kazuro Funabashi
Woolrich Source	*The Black Angel* (1943)
Director	Sokichi Tomimoto

Aiko Manabe	Ayako Wakao
Aiko Manabe	Masaya Takahashi
Toshiro Matsutani	Masahiko Naruse
Jiro Morito	Koji Nanbrara
Shintaro Baba	Eiji Funagoshi
Fumikichi Hayashi	Yuzo Hayakawa
Assistant Inspector Noguchi	Koichi Uenoyama
?	Akira Natsuki
Kinuko	Hitomi Amachi
Asami Togawa	Michiko Hikari

LA MARIÉE ÉTAIT EN NOIR/THE BRIDE WORE BLACK (Les Films du Carrosse, 1968)

Producer	Marcel Roberts
Photographer	Raoul Coutard
Film Editor	Claudine Bouche

Music Score	Bernard Herrmann
Screenplay	François Truffaut, Jean-Louis Richard
Woolrich Source	*The Bride Wore Black* (1940)
Director	François Truffaut

Julie Kohler	Jeanne Moreau
Corey	Jean-Claude Brialy
Robert Coral	Michel Bouquet
Fergus	Charles Denner
Bliss	Claude Rich
Delvaux	Daniel Boulanger
Clement Morane	Michel Lonsdale
David	Serge Rousseau
Charlie	Jacques Robiolles
Julie's Mother	Luce Fabiole
Mme. Morane	Sylvine Delannoy
Maid	Jacqueline Rouillard
Inspector Fabri	Van Doude
Mechanic	Paul Pavel
Plaintiff	Maurice Garell
Examining Magistrate	Gilles Queant

LA SIRÈNE DU MISSISSIPPI/MISSISSIPPI MERMAID

(Les Films du Carrosse, 1969)

Producer	Marcel Berbert
Photographer	Deny Clerval
Film Editor	Agnes Guillemot
Music Score	Antoine Duhamel
Screenplay	François Truffaut
Woolrich Source	*Waltz into Darkness* (1947)
Director	François Truffaut

Louis Mahé	Jean-Paul Belmondo
Marion/Julie Roussel	Catherine Deneuve
Comolli	Michel Bouquet
Berthe Roussel	Nelly Borgeaud
Jardine	Marcel Berbert
Landlady	Martine Ferriere
Richard	Roland Thénot

MARTHA (WDR-Germany, 1973)

Producer	?
Photographer	Michael Ballhaus
Film Editor	Liesgret Schmitt-Klink
Music Score	?
Screenplay	Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Woolrich Source	"For the Rest of Her Life" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, May 1968)
Director	Rainer Werner Fassbinder
Martha Hyer/Martha Salomon	Margit Carstensen
Helmut Salomon	Karlheinz Böhm
Mother	Gisela Fackeldey
Father	Adrian Hoven
Marianne	Barbara Valentin
Kaiser	Peter Chatel
Ilse	Ingrid Caven
Erna	Ortrud Beginnen
Dr. Salomon	Gunter Lamprecht

LA PUPA DEL GANGSTER (CCC/Concordia-Italy, 1974)

Producer	?
Photographer	Alberto Spagnoli
Film Editor	Renato Cinquini
Music Score	Piero Umiliani
Screenplay	Ernesto Castaldi
Woolrich Source	"Collared" (*Black Mask*, October 1939)
Director	Giorgio Capitani
	Sophia Loren
	Marcello Mastroianni
	Aldo Maccione
	Pierre Brice
	Dalila Di Lazzaro
	Mario Maranzana
	Ester Carloni

J'AI EPOUSÉ UNE OMBRE/I MARRIED A SHADOW
(Sara Films/T.F. 1 Films, 1982)

Producer	Alain Sarde
Photographer	Bernard Zitzerman
Film Editor	Marie Castro Vasquez
Music Score	Philippe Sarde
Screenplay	Patrick Laurent, Robin Davis
Dialogue	Patrick Laurent
Woolrich Source	*I Married a Dead Man* (1948)
Director	Robin Davis
Hélène Georges	Nathalie Baye
Pierre Meyrand	Francis Huster
Frank	Richard Bohringer
Mme. Léna Meyrand	Madeleine Robinson
Mathieu Meyrand	Guy Tréjan
Fifo	Victoria Abril
Patricia Meyrand	Véronique Genest

CORNELL WOOLRICH AS ADAPTED FOR U.S. RADIO: CHRONOLOGY AND CREDITS

ESCAPE
(CBS, 1947–54)

Papa Benjamin." January 24, 1948. Produced and directed by William N. Robson. Adapted by John Dunkel from "Dark Melody of Madness" (1935). With Frank Lovejoy, Luis Van Rooten, Harry Bartell, Joan Banks, William Conrad.

Finger of Doom." March 19, 1949. Produced and directed by Norman Macdonnell. Adapted by John Brussell from "Finger of Doom" (1940). With Harry Bartell, Ed Begley, Joy Terry, Edgar Barrier, Louise Arthur, Peter Prauss, Kay Miller.

HOUR OF MYSTERY
(ABC, 1946)

The Black Angel." June 16, 1946. Adapted from the movie *Black Angel* (1946), which is based on *The Black Angel* (1943). With Geraldine Fitzgerald.

Phantom Lady." August 18, 1946. Adapted from the movie *Phantom Lady* (1944), which is based on *Phantom Lady* (1942). With Franchot Tone, Roger Pryor.

LUX RADIO THEATRE
(NBC, 1934–35; CBS, 1935–54; NBC, 1954–55)

"Phantom Lady." March 27, 1944. Adapted from the movie *Phanto* *Lady* (1944), which is based on *Phantom Lady* (1942). With Bria Aherne, Ella Raines, Alan Curtis.

"Deadline at Dawn." May 20, 1946. Adapted from the movie *Deadli* *at Dawn* (1946), which is based on *Deadline at Dawn* (1944). Wit Joan Blondell, Paul Lukas, Bill Williams, Gerald Mohr.

MOLLE MYSTERY THEATRE
(NBC, 1943–44; Mutual, 1944–45; NBC, 1945–47 and [as *Mystery Theatre*] 1947–48; CBS, 1948–51)

"Dreadful Memory." November 30, 1943. Adapted from an unide tified Woolrich story.

"The Death Rose." September 26, 1944. Adapted from "The Deat Rose" (1943).

"Nightmare." November 28, 1944. Adapted from "And So to Death (1941).

"Deadline at Dawn." January 30, 1945. Adapted from *Deadline a* *Dawn* (1944). With Ann Loring, Larry Haines.

"After-Dinner Story." March 20, 1945. Adapted from "After-Dinne Story" (1938).

"Marihuana." June 26, 1945. Adapted from "Marihuana" (1941).

"A Death Is Caused." October 12, 1945. Adapted by J.B. Smith fro "Mind Over Murder" (1943).

"Leg Man." October 19, 1945. Adapted from "Leg Man" (1943).

"Post Mortem." November 23, 1945. Adapted from "Post Mortem (1940).

"I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes." December 14, 1945. Adapted from " Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (1938).

"Dime a Dance." January 11, 1946. Adapted by F. Maytho from "Dim a Dance" (1938).

"The Mathematics of Murder." February 1, 1946. Adapted from "Wha the Well Dressed Corpse Will Wear" (1944).

"Last Night." February 22, 1946. Adapted from "The Red Tide" (1940)

"Silent As the Grave." August 9, 1946. Adapted from "Silent As th Grave" (1945).

"Nightmare." August 30, 1946. Repeat of play first broadcast Novem ber 28, 1944.

"Two Men in a Furnished Room." September 27, 1946. Adapted by Paul Monash from "He Looked Like Murder" (1941). With John Beal, Sam Wanamaker.

"Black Alibi." October 11, 1946. Adapted from *Black Alibi* (1941).

"Blackmail." January 24, 1947. Adapted from "Face Work" (1937).

"The Bride Wore Black." February 7, 1947. Adapted from *The Bride Wore Black* (1940). With June Havoc.

"The Orphan Diamond." March 7, 1947. Adapted from "Orphan Ice" (1942).

"Dime a Dance." March 14, 1947. Repeat of play first broadcast January 11, 1946.

"Chance." July 18, 1947. Adapted from "Dormant Account" (1942).

"Silent As the Grave." August 29, 1947. Repeat of play first broadcast August 9, 1946.

"The Earring." March 5, 1948. Adapted from "The Death Stone" (1943).

"Silent As the Grave." July 13, 1948. Repeat of play first broadcast August 9, 1946.

Note: The *Molle* episode "Angel Face," broadcast October 5, 1945, and repeated December 20, 1946, is an original script by Walter Wilson, unrelated to the Woolrich story "Face Work" (1937), which is often reprinted under that name.

MURDER BY EXPERTS
(Mutual, 1949–51)

"Nightmare." February 19, 1951. Adapted from "And So to Death" (1941).

NIGHTMARE
(Mutual, 1953–54)

"If I Should Die Before I Wake." August 25, 1954. Adapted from "If I Should Die Before I Wake" (1937). With Peter Lorre.

PRESENTING BORIS KARLOFF
(ABC, 1949)

"Three O'Clock." November 30, 1949. Adapted from "Three O'Clock" (1938).

"The Night Reveals." December 14, 1949. Adapted from "The Night Reveals" (1936).

RADIO CITY PLAYHOUSE
(NBC, 1948–50)

"Wardrobe Trunk." April 4, 1949. Adapted from "Dilemma of the Dea Lady" (1936).

SCREEN DIRECTORS' PLAYHOUSE
(NBC, 1949–51)

"Night Has a Thousand Eyes." February 27, 1949. Adapted by Milto Geiger from the movie *Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948) which based on *Night Has A Thousand Eyes* (1945). With Edward Robinson, William Demarest. Host: John Farrow.

SCREEN GUILD THEATRE
(CBS, 1939–48; NBC, 1948–50; ABC, 1950–51)

"Phantom Lady." September 11, 1944. Produced and directed by Bi Lawrence. Adapted from the movie *Phantom Lady* (1944), which i based on *Phantom Lady* (1942). With Ralph Bellamy, Louis Allbritton.

SUSPENSE
(CBS, 1942–62)

"The Night Reveals." March 2, 1943. Produced by William Spier Directed by Ted Bliss. Adapted by Sigmund Miller from "Th Night Reveals" (1936). With Fredric March.

"Last Night." June 15, 1943. Produced by William Spier. Directed b Ted Bliss. Adapted from "The Red Tide" (1940). With Margo, Ken Smith.

"The White Rose Murders." July 6, 1943. Produced by William Spier Directed by Ted Bliss. Adapted from "The Death Rose" (1943) With Maureen O'Hara.

"The Singing Walls." September 2, 1943. Produced by William Spier Directed by Ted Bliss. Adapted by Robert L. Richards from "C-Jag" (1940). With Preston Foster, Dane Clark.

"After-Dinner Story." October 26, 1943. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted by Robert L. Richards from "After-Dinner Story" (1938). With Otto Kruger, Hans Conried, Bill Johnstone.

"The Black Curtain." December 2, 1943. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from *The Black Curtain* (1941). With Cary Grant, Lurene Tuttle.

"The Night Reveals." December 9, 1943. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted by Sigmund Miller from "The Night Reveals" (1936). With Robert Young, Margo, Hans Conried, Joseph Kearns.

"Dime a Dance." January 13, 1944. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "Dime a Dance" (1938). With Lucille Ball, Hans Conried.

"The Black Path of Fear." August 31, 1944. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from *The Black Path of Fear* (1944). With Brian Donlevy, Hans Conried.

"You'll Never See Me Again." September 14, 1944. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "You'll Never See Me Again" (1939). With Joseph Cotten, Lurene Tuttle.

"Eve." October 19, 1944. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted by Robert L. Richards from *The Black Angel* (1943). With Nancy Kelly.

"The Singing Walls." November 2, 1944. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted by Robert L. Richards from "C-Jag" (1940). With Van Johnson.

"The Black Curtain." November 30, 1944. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from *The Black Curtain* (1941). With Cary Grant.

"Library Book." September 20, 1945. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "The Book That Squealed" (1939). With Myrna Loy, Joseph Kearns, Wally Maher.

"I Won't Take a Minute." December 6, 1945. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "Finger of Doom" (1940). With Lee Bowman.

"The Black Path of Fear." March 7, 1946. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from *The Black Path of Fear* (1944). With Cary Grant.

"Post Mortem." April 4, 1946. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "Post Mortem" (1940). With Agnes Moorehead, Joseph Kearns.

"The Night Reveals." April 18, 1946. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted by Sigmund Miller from "The Night Reveals" (1936). With Keenan Wynn, Cathy Lewis.

"You'll Never See Me Again." September 5, 1946. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "You'll Never See Me Again" (1939). With Robert Young.

"They Call Me Patrice." December 12, 1946. Produced and directed by William Spier. Adapted from "They Call Me Patrice" (1946). With Susan Peters, Bill Johnstone, Joseph Kearns.

"You Take Ballistics." March 13, 1947. Produced and directed b William Spier. Adapted from "You Take Ballistics" (1938). Wit Howard da Silva, Jack Webb.

Note: At this point the series expanded from thirty to sixty minute

"The Black Curtain." January 3, 1948. Produced and directed b William Spier. Adapted from *The Black Curtain* (1941). Wit Robert Montgomery, Lurene Tuttle, Cathy Lewis, Jeanette Nola Jack Kruschen, William Conrad, Joseph Kearns, Jeff Chandle Sidney Miller, Paul Frees, Conrad Binyon, Jerry Hausner, Harr Lang, Ira Griselle, Junius Matthews.

"Eve." January 24, 1948. Produced and directed by William Spie Adapted by Robert L. Richards and Sebastian Moriarty from *Th Black Angel* (1943). With June Havoc, Bill Johnstone, Wall Maher, Jack Miles, Prince Michael Romanoff, Lurene Tuttle, Jac Kruschen, Dick Ryan, Frank Albertson, Alan Reed.

"Nightmare." March 13, 1948. Produced by Robert Montgomer Directed by Anton M. Leader. Adapted by Alfred Palker from "An So to Death" (1941). With Eddie Bracken, William Conrad, Bil Johnstone.

"Deadline at Dawn." May 15, 1948. Produced and directed by Anto M. Leader. Adapted by Irving Ravetch from *Deadline at Daw* (1944). With Helen Walker, John Beal, Bill Johnstone, Lillia Byer, Rye Billsbury, Edith Lackner, Buddy Gray.

Note: At this point the series returned to a thirty-minute format.

"If the Dead Could Talk." January 20, 1949. Produced and directed b Anton M. Leader. Adapted by Larry Marcus from "If the Dea Could Talk" (1943). With Dana Andrews, Ted de Corsia, Vern Felton.

"Three O'Clock." March 10, 1949. Produced and directed by Anton M Leader. Adapted by Walter Newman from "Three O'Clock" (1938) With Van Heflin, Ted de Corsia.

"The Lie." April 28, 1949. Produced and directed by Anton M. Leader Adapted by Herb Meadow from "The Lie" (1937). With Mickey Rooney, Bill Johnstone, Joseph Kearns.

"The Night Reveals." May 26, 1949. Produced and directed by Anton M. Leader. Adapted by Sigmund Miller from "The Night Reveals" (1936). With Fredric March, Jeanette Nolan.

"Momentum." October 27, 1949. Produced by William Spier. Directed by Norman Macdonnell. Adapted by E. Jack Neuman from "Murder Always Gathers Momentum" (1940). With Victor Mature, Lurene Tuttle.

"Angel Face." May 18, 1950. Produced by William Spier. Directed by Norman Macdonnell. Adapted from "Face Work" (1937). With Claire Trevor, Joseph Kearns.

Note: Several *Suspense* episodes sound from their titles like adaptations of Woolrich stories but aren't. "No More Alice" (March 14, 1946) is not based on "All at Once, No Alice." "Subway" (October 30, 1947) has no connection with the Woolrich story collected under that name. "The Day I Died" (June 30, 1949) is not based on "The Night I Died." And the "Nightmare" broadcast September 1, 1949, is unrelated to the Woolrich novelette, best known by that name, which in fact *was* the basis of the sixty-minute *Suspense* episode of March 13, 1948.

THIS IS HOLLYWOOD
(CBS, 1946–47)

"The Chase." November 9, 1946. Adapted from the movie *The Chase* (1946), which is based on *The Black Path of Fear* (1944). With Michele Morgan, Robert Montgomery.

TONIGHT'S BEST STORY
(WHN, 1940)

"The Night Reveals." April 16, 1940. Adapted from "The Night Reveals" (1936).

CORNELL WOOLRICH AS ADAPTED FOR TELEVISION: CHRONOLOGY AND CREDITS

I. SEEN ON U.S. TELEVISION (substantially complete list)

"Revenge." *Suspense*, CBS, March 1, 1949. Based on *The Black Path of Fear* (1944). Live, 30 minutes. With Eddie Albert, Margo.

"Three O'Clock." *The Actor's Studio*, ABC, March 31, 1949. Based on "Three O'Clock" (1938). Live, 30 minutes. With Steven Hill, Frances Reid, Philip Bourneuf.

"The Man Upstairs." *Suspense*, CBS, April 5, 1949. Based on "The Man Upstairs" (1945). Live, 30 minutes. With Anthony Ross, Mildred Natwick.

"After-Dinner Story." *Suspense*, CBS, April 12, 1949. Based on "After-Dinner Story" (1938). Live, 30 minutes. With Otto Kruger.

"Post Mortem." *Suspense*, CBS, May 10, 1949. Based on "Post Mortem" (1940). Teleplay by Frank Gabrielson. Live, 30 minutes. With Peggy Conklin, Sidney Blackmer.

"Silent As the Grave." *Silver Theater*, CBS, November 21, 1949. Based on "Silent As the Grave" (1945). Live, 30 minutes. With Marsha Hunt, George Reeves. Host: Conrad Nagel.

"Three O'Clock." *Mystery Playhouse*, ABC, December 1, 1949. Based on "Three O'Clock" (1938). Live, 30 minutes. Host: Boris Karloff.

"The Night Reveals." *Mystery Playhouse*, ABC, December 15, 194 Based on "The Night Reveals" (1936). Live, 30 minutes. Hos Boris Karloff.

"Phantom Lady." *Robert Montgomery Presents*, NBC, April 24, 195 Based on *Phantom Lady* (1942). Live, 60 minutes. With Ell Raines, Hugh Reilly, Gordon Mills. Host: Robert Montgomery

"Change of Murder." *Video Theatre*, NBC, May 21, 1950. Based o "Change of Murder" (1936). Live, 30 minutes. With Bernar Nedell, Charles Jordan, Alfred Hopson.

"I Won't Take a Minute." *Nash Airflyte Theater*, CBS, November 1950. Based on "Finger of Doom" (1940). Live, 30 minutes. Wit Dane Clark. Host: William Gaxton.

"Three O'Clock." *Robert Montgomery Presents*, NBC, June 18, 1951 Based on "Three O'Clock" (1938). Live, 60 minutes. With Vaugh Taylor, Olive Deering, Robert Montgomery. Host: Robert Montgomery.

"Through a Dead Man's Eye." *Assignment Manhunt*, NBC, July 21 1951. Based on "Through a Dead Man's Eye" (1939). Live, 3 minutes.

"I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes." *Robert Montgomery Presents*, NBC October 22, 1951. Based on "I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes" (1938) Live, 60 minutes. With Vaughn Taylor, Katherine Squire. Host Robert Montgomery.

"Nightmare." *Suspense*, CBS, November 7, 1951. Based on "And So t Death" (1941). Live, 30 minutes. With Richard Kiley, Berry Kroeger.

"Lullaby." *Revlon Mirror Theatre*, CBS, October 3, 1953. Based on "Humming Bird Comes Home" (1937). Film, 30 minutes. With Agnes Moorehead, Tom Drake, Betty Lynn.

"Wait for Me Downstairs." *Pepsi-Cola Playhouse*, ABC, October 9 1953. Based on "Finger of Doom" (1940). Film, 30 minutes. With John Hudson, Allene Roberts.

"Summer Dance." *Revlon Mirror Theatre*, CBS, November 21, 1953. Based on "Death Between Dances" (1947). Film, 30 minutes. With Jane Greer, Barbara Bates.

"The Loophole." *The Mask*, ABC, February 7, 1954. Based on "Three Kills for One" (1942). Live, 60 minutes. Starring Gary Merrill and William Prince as series characters Walter and Peter Guilfoyle. With Brian Keith (Blake), Russell Hardy (Lt. Hardy), Audrey Christie (Rhea), Betty Garde (Mrs. Novak).

"The Chase." *Lux Video Theatre*, NBC, December 30, 1954. Based on the movie *The Chase* (1946), which in turn had been based on *The Black Path of Fear* (1944). Live, 60 minutes. With Pat O'Brien (Eddie), Ruth Roman (Lorna), James Arness (Chuck). Host: James Mason.

Debt of Honor." *Stage 7*, CBS, February 20, 1955. Based on "I.O.U.—One Life" (1938). Film, 30 minutes. With Edmond O'Brien (Clinton Sturgess), Charles Bronson (Murray Forman), Wendy Winkleman (Barbara Sturgess), Laura Elliot (Martha Sturgess), Steve Pendleton (Hyland).

Husband." *Ford Theatre*, NBC, October 13, 1955. Based on "Husband" (1949). Film, 30 minutes. With Barry Sullivan (Blaine Chandler), Mala Powers (Alma Alexander), Jonathan Hale (Dr. Stanley), Ralph Dumke (Sam), Frank Hanley (Dr. Bartlett).

'The Blue Ribbon." *Ford Theatre*, NBC, November 10, 1955. Based on "The Blue Ribbon" (1949). Directed by Ted Post from a teleplay by Richard Collins. Film, 30 minutes. With Scott Brady (O'Reilly), Gene Barry (Carp), Marjorie Rambeau (Mrs. O'Reilly), Stanley Adams (Shackley).

'Once Upon a Nightmare." *Fireside Theater*, NBC, January 3, 1956. Based on "Murder at Mother's Knee" (1941). Film, 30 minutes. With Jane Wyman (Emily Prince), David Kasday (Johnnie Gaines), Arthur Space (Paul Kendall), Vivi Janiss (Agnes Mason), Emile Meyer (Ed Mason).

"The Big Switch." *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, CBS, January 8, 1956. Based on "Change of Murder" (1936). Directed by Don Weis from a teleplay by Richard Carr. Film, 30 minutes. With George Mathews (Sam), George E. Stone (Barney), Joseph Downing (Al), J. Edwards (Ed), Beverly Michaels (Goldie), Mark Dana (Morgan). Host: Alfred Hitchcock.

"The Listener." *Four Star Playhouse*, CBS, February 2, 1956. Based on "The Case of the Talking Eyes" (1939). Teleplay by Frank L. Moss. Film, 30 minutes. With Ida Lupino (Vera Miller), Ralph Moody (Jarvis Miller), Walter Coy (Verne Miller), Richard Lupino (Jimmy), Nan Boardman (Rose Sharon), Don Rickles (Announcer), Paul Bryar (Lt. Casement).

"Sit Down with Death." *Climax!*, CBS, April 26, 1956. Based on "After Dinner Story" (1938). Teleplay by James P. Cavanagh. Live and in color, 60 minutes. With Ralph Bellamy (Philip Hardecker Sr.), William Talman (Joe MacKenzie), John Williams (Harold Johnson), Vicki Cummings (Liza Farley), Constance Ford (Ellen MacKenzie). Host: William Lundigan.

"Momentum." *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, CBS, June 24, 1956. Based on "Murder Always Gathers Momentum" (1940). Directed by Robert Stevens from a teleplay by Francis Cockrell. Film, 30 minutes. With Skip Homeier (Dick Paine), Joanne Woodward (Beth Paine), Ken Christy (A.T. Burroughs), Henry Hunter (Man from Finance Company), Mike Ragan (Cab Driver), Billy Newell (Charlie), Frank Kreig (Janitor). Host: Alfred Hitchcock.

"The Guilty." *Lux Video Theatre,* NBC, October 11, 1956. Based on t movie *The Guilty* (1947), which in turn had been based on " Looked Like Murder" (1941). Live and in color, 60 minutes. Wi Ralph Meeker. Host: Gordon MacRae.

"Rendezvous in Black." *Playhouse 90,* CBS, October 25, 1956. Bas on *Rendezvous in Black* (1948). Live, 90 minutes. With Franch Tone (Hugh Strickland), Laraine Day (Florence Strickland), Bor Karloff (Ward Allen), Tom Drake (Johnny Mark), Viveca Lindfo (Martine), Elizabeth Patterson (Mrs. Middleton). Host: Fran Lovejoy.

"The Earring." *General Electric Theater,* CBS, January 13, 1957. Base on "The Death Stone" (1943). Film, 30 minutes. With Gre Garson (Lydia Shaw), Eduard Franz (David Shaw), Philip Ree (Phil), Norman Lloyd (Johnny), Barney Phillips (Lt. Weil), Rut Lee (Jane), Clark Howat (Milkman), Frank Wolff (Cab Driver Host: Ronald Reagan.

"You Take Ballistics." *Heinz Studio 57,* syndicated. First New Yor broadcast February 10, 1957. Based on "You Take Ballistics (1938). Film, 30 minutes. With Joseph Wiseman, Lee Marvin.

"Black Angel." *Lux Video Theatre,* NBC, March 28, 1957. Based on th movie *Black Angel* (1946), which in turn had been based on *Th Black Angel* (1943). Live and in color, 60 minutes. With Joh Ireland, Marilyn Erskine. Host: Gordon MacRae.

"Cab Driver." *General Electric Theater,* CBS, April 14, 1957. Based o "Cab, Mister?" (1937). Teleplay by John L. Greene. Film, 3 minutes. With Imogene Coca (Virginia Odell), Keenan Wynn (Sgt Kelsey), Harry Shearer (Timmy), Joseph Downing (Lieutenant) Harry Bartell (Sheridan), Joyce Jameson (Blonde). Host: Ronal Reagan.

"The Night I Died." *George Sanders Mystery Theatre,* NBC, August 31 1957. Based on "The Night I Died" (1936). Film, 30 minutes. With Howard McNear (Ben), Eve McVeagh (Thelma), Scotty Beckett (Darrell), Paul Gary (Nick), Benny Rubin (Morris), Ted Jacques (Police Chief). Host: George Sanders.

"Four O'Clock." *Suspicion,* NBC, September 30, 1957. Based on "Three O'Clock" (1938). Directed by Alfred Hitchcock from a teleplay by Francis Cockrell. Film, 60 minutes. With Nancy Kelly (Fran Steppe), E.G. Marshall (Paul Steppe), Richard Long (Dave), Tom Pittman (Joe), Dean Stanton (Bill), Charles Seel (Male Customer), Vernon Rich (Doctor), David Armstrong (Policeman), Juney Ellis (Mother), Jesslyn Fax (Wife), Brian Corcoran (Boy). Host: Dennis O'Keefe.

"Bluebeard's Seventh Wife." *Schlitz Playhouse of Stars,* CBS, March 21, 1958. Based on "Bluebeard's Seventh Wife" (1936). Film, 30 minutes. With Ralph Meeker (Rich Adams), Phyllis Avery (Betty Mathews), Hugh Marlowe (Frank), Jackie Loughery (Flo).

"Post Mortem." *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, CBS, May 18, 1958. Based on "Post Mortem" (1940). Directed by Arthur Hiller from a teleplay by Robert C. Dennis. Film, 30 minutes. With Joanna Moore (Judy Archer), Steve Forrest (Stephen Archer), James Gregory (Westcott). Host: Alfred Hitchcock.

"Fire by Night." *Moment of Fear*, NBC, July 22, 1960. Based on "The Night Reveals" (1936). Teleplay by David Davidson. Live and in color, 60 minutes. With Mark Richman (Harry Jordan), Fay Spain (Marie Jordan), Phyllis Hill (Ruth Minton), Frank Overton (Psychiatrist).

"Papa Benjamin." *Thriller*, NBC, March 21, 1961. Based on "Dark Melody of Madness" (1935). Directed by Ted Post from a teleplay by John Kneubuhl. Film, 60 minutes. With John Ireland (Eddie Wilson), Jeanne Bal (Judy), Jester Hairston (Papa Benjamin). Host: Boris Karloff.

"Late Date." *Thriller*, NBC, April 4, 1961. Based on "The Corpse and the Kid" (1935). Directed by Herschel Daugherty from a teleplay by Donald S. Sanford. Film, 60 minutes. With Larry Pennell (Larry Weeks), Edward C. Platt (Jim Weeks), Jody Fair (Helen), Chris Seitz (Gordon). Host: Boris Karloff.

"Guillotine." *Thriller*, NBC, September 25, 1961. Based on "Men Must Die" (1939). Directed by Ida Lupino from a teleplay by Charles Beaumont. Film, 60 minutes. With Alejandro Rey (Robert Lamont), Danielle de Metz (Babette Lamont), Robert Middleton (M. de Paris). Host: Boris Karloff.

"The Black Curtain." *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, CBS, November 15, 1962. Based on *The Black Curtain* (1941). Directed by Sydney Pollack from a teleplay by Joel Murcott. Film, 60 minutes. With Richard Basehart (Phil Townsend), Lola Albright (Ruth), Lee Philips (Frank Carlin), Harold J. Stone (Taxi Driver), James Farentino (Bernie). Host: Alfred Hitchcock.

"Jane Brown's Body." *Journey to the Unknown*, ABC, October 3, 1968 (at least in some parts of the United States). Based on "Jane Brown's Body" (1938). Directed by Alan Gibson from a teleplay by Anthony Skene. Film, 60 minutes. With Julie Harris, Stefanie Powers, Alan MacNaughton, Sarah Lawson, David Burke.

You'll Never See Me Again. ABC, February 28, 1973. Based on "You'll Never See Me Again" (1939). Directed by Jeannot Szwarc from a teleplay by William Wood and Gerald DiPego. Film, 90 minutes, color. With David Hartman (Ned Bliss), Jane Wyatt (Mary Alden), Ralph Meeker (Will Alden), Jess Walton (Vickie Bliss), Joseph Campanella (Lt. John Stillman), Colby Chester (Bob Sellini), Bo Svenson (Sam).

"Guillotine." *Darkroom*, ABC, January 8, 1982. Based on "Men Must Die" (1939). Directed by Rick Rosenthal from a teleplay by Peter

Allan Fields. Film, about 45 minutes, color. With Michael Constantine (M. de Paris), Patti d'Arbanville (Babette), France Benard (Pierre). Host: James Coburn.

"Four O'Clock." *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, NBC, May 4, 1986. Based on "Three O'Clock" (1938). Directed by Andrew Mirisch from a teleplay by Steve Bello. Film, 30 minutes, color. With Kenneth McMillan (Judge Paul Magrew), Ellen Tobie (Karen Magrew), Richard Cox (Ben), Raymond Singer (Prosecutor), Nicholas Pryor (Ryan). Host: Alfred Hitchcock.

II. SEEN ONLY ON OVERSEAS TELEVISION (incomplete list)

"You'll Never See Me Again." *Armchair Summer Theater*, ITV (England), 1959. Based on "You'll Never See Me Again" (1939). Directed by Ted Post. Film, about 90 minutes. With Ben Gazzara, Leo Genn, Brenda de Banzie, James Hayter.

"La Boucle d'Oreille." FR3, France, 1979. Based on "The Death Stone" (1943). Directed by Claude Chabrol from a teleplay by Jean Bany. Film, 55 minutes. With Thérèse Liotard, Pierre Douglas, Jacques Spiesser.

"Une Derniere Fois, Catherine." FR3, France, 1979. Based on "One Last Night" (1940). Directed by Pierre Grimblat from a teleplay by J.P. Manchette. Film, 58 minutes. With Marc Porel, Elisabeth Huppert, Michel Auclair, J.P. Darras.

"Folies Douces." FR3, France, 1979. Based on "Silent As the Grave" (1945). Directed by Maurice Ronet from a teleplay by Maurice Ronet and Claudine Reinach. Film, 64 minutes. With Maurice Ronet, Joséphine Charlin, Bernard Le Coq, Maurice Biraud.

"Tu Comprends Ça, Soldat?" FR3, France, 1979. Based on "The Light in the Window" (1946). Directed by Pierre Granier-Deferre from a teleplay by Jean Bany and Pierre Granier-Deferre. Film, 55 minutes. With Laurent Malet, Valérie Mairesse.

"La Strategie du Serpent." FR3, France, 1979. Based on "Mind Over Murder" (1943). Directed by Yves Boisset from a teleplay by Bernard Revon and Yves Boisset. Film, 56 minutes. With Jean Carmet, Eva Darlan, Andrea Ferreol, Prince Panya Souvann Pouma.

"Le Locataire d'en Haut." FR3, France, 1979. Based on "The Man Upstairs" (1945). Directed by Gilles Grangier from a teleplay by Jean Herman and Gilles Grangier. Film, 60 minutes. With Bernard Fresson, Juliette Mills, Pierre Destailles.

CORNELL WOOLRICH:
A CHECKLIST OF SECONDARY SOURCES

NOTE

This checklist is selective, but I hope it will give readers an idea of the secondary literature available on Woolrich and on the movement in fiction and film with which he was closely allied. I have not listed any of the extensive materials available in languages other than English and have not included any of my own previous writings on Woolrich.

I. BOOKS

Bruccoli, Matthew J. *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. (Perhaps the best biography of the writer who most decisively influenced Woolrich's early career.)

Chierichetti, David. *Hollywood Director*. New York: Curtis Books,

1973. (A career study of director Mitchell Leisen, including a section on his Woolrich-based movie *No Man of Her Own*.)

Clurman, Harold. *All People Are Famous*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974. (The director's autobiography includes some material on his filming of the Woolrich-based *Deadline at Dawn*.)

Cook, Michael L. *Mystery, Detective and Espionage Magazine*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983. (The best source of information on the magazines in which Woolrich's short fiction was first published.)

Dunning, John. *Tune In Yesterday*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976. (The most reliable guide to the numerous dramatic radio series for which Woolrich's fiction was adapted in the 1940s.)

Ellison, Harlan. *No Doors, No Windows*. New York: Ace Books, 1983. (This collection of Ellison's short stories includes an introduction, "Blood/Thoughts," in which he describes his brief meeting with Woolrich, and also includes the story "Tired Old Man," which he based on that meeting.)

Foley, Martha. *The Story of STORY Magazine*. Edited and with an introduction and afterword by Jay Neugeboren. New York: W.W. Norton, 1980. (Includes some anecdotes about Woolrich.)

Gianakos, Larry James. *Television Drama Series Programming: A Comprehensive Chronicle*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1983. (A chaotically organized but useful four-volume guide to the TV dramatic series which often presented live or filmed adaptations of Woolrich's work.)

Gow, Gordon. *Suspense in the Cinema*. London: A. Zwemmer Ltd./New York: A.S. Barnes, 1968. (Includes a detailed analysis of the Woolrich-based movie *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*.)

Gregory, Sinda. *Private Investigations: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett*. Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984. (One of the best accounts of Hammett's contributions to *noir* literature.)

Gross, Miriam, ed. *The World of Raymond Chandler*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977; New York: A&W Publishing, 1978. (Includes several essays on Chandler's contributions to *noir* literature.)

Gruber, Frank. *The Pulp Jungle*. Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1967. (Extensive reminiscences of pulp writers and writing in the 1930s, including some anecdotes about Woolrich.)

Haycraft, Howard. *Murder for Pleasure*. New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1941. (This pioneering study of mystery fiction describes Woolrich as one of the "writers of crime *tours de force*" on a par with English authors like Marie Belloc Lowndes and Francis Iles. This strange judgment seems to have been made on the basis only of *The Bride Wore Black*.)

Haycraft, Howard, ed. *The Art of the Mystery Story*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946. (This indispensable anthology of materials on crime fiction includes many references to Woolrich, most notably the discussion in James Sandoe's "Dagger of the Mind," listed in Part II below.)

Hirsch, Foster. *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir*. New York: A.S. Barnes, 1981. (The best single-author book on the film genre to which Woolrich's fiction contributed so much.)

Hoopes, Roy. *Cain*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982. (Edgar-winning biography of James M. Cain, one of the four founding fathers of *noir* literature.)

Johnson, Diane. *Dashiell Hammett: A Life*. New York: Random House, 1983. (The Hammett biography most heavily dependent, for better and worse, on the views of Hammett's lover Lillian Hellman.)

Layman, Richard. *Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. (One of the most reliable of the several recent Hammett biographies.)

Luhr, William. *Raymond Chandler and Film*. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982. (The best study of Chandler's contributions to *film noir*.)

MacShane, Frank. *The Life of Raymond Chandler*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976. (Edgar-winning biography of the last of *noir* literature's quartet of founders.)

MacShane, Frank, ed. *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981. (A generous sampling of Chandler's correspondence, which includes some provocative remarks about Woolrich.)

McCarthy, Todd, and Charles Flynn, ed. *Kings of the Bs*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975. (Includes several interesting essays on *film noir*, most notably Tom Flinn's "Three Faces of Film Noir," listed in Part II below, which discusses at length the Woolrich-based *Phantom Lady*.)

Malzberg, Barry N. *The Engines of the Night*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982. (This collection of Malzberg's essays on science fiction and other subjects includes a memoir of Woolrich's last years.)

Nolan, William F. *Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook*. Santa Barbara: McNally & Loftin, 1969. (Pioneering account of Hammett and his achievements.)

Nolan, William F. *Hammett: A Life at the Edge*. New York: Congdon & Weed, 1983. (A more complete bio-critical work on Hammett by the author of the first book in that crowded field.)

O'Brien, Geoffrey. *Hardboiled America*. New York: Van Nostrand

Reinhold, 1981. (A study of *noir* literature, including some remarks on Woolrich.)

Ottoson, Robert. *A Reference Guide to the American Film Noir, 1940–1958*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1981. (Includes entries on several movies based on Woolrich.)

Petrie, Graham. *The Cinema of François Truffaut*. London: A. Zwemmer Ltd./New York: A.S. Barnes, 1970. (Includes thought-provoking chapters on Truffaut's Woolrich-based films *The Bride Wore Black* and *Mississippi Mermaid*.)

Scott, Sutherland. *Blood in Their Ink*. London: Stanley Paul, 1953; Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973. (Includes some comments about Woolrich from an English perspective.)

Siegel, Joel E. *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror*. New York: Viking Press, 1973. (Includes an excellent chapter on producer Lewton's filming of the Woolrich-based *The Leopard Man*.)

Silver, Alain, and Elizabeth Ward, ed. *Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to the American Style*. Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1979. (Includes entries on many of the suspense films adapted from Woolrich.)

Slide, Anthony. *The Big V*. New and revised edition. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987. (The standard work on the Vitagraph studio founded by Woolrich's father-in-law J. Stuart Blackton, and on the family into which Woolrich briefly married.)

Spoto, Donald. *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*. New York: Hopkinson & Blake, 1976. (The best single critical work on the films of Woolrich's death-haunted soul-brother, including of course the Woolrich-based *Rear Window*.)

Spoto, Donald. *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*. Boston: Little Brown, 1983. (The most comprehensive and controversial, and perhaps the best, of all the books on Hitchcock's life.)

Swanson, H.N. *Sprinkled with Ruby Dust*. New York: Warner Books, 1988. (The autobiography of the man who bought Woolrich's earliest magazine stories and later became his movie agent includes some brief reminiscences of Woolrich.)

Symons, Julian. *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1985. (In this revised edition of his generally excellent 1972 study of crime fiction previously known in the United States as *Mortal Consequences*, Symons devotes to Woolrich exactly one paragraph, and that one filled with very harsh criticism indeed.)

Taylor, John Russell. *Hitch: The Life and Work of Alfred Hitchcock*. London: Faber & Faber, 1978. U.S. title: *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. (The authorized Hitchcock biography.)

odorov, Tzvetan. *The Poetics of Prose*. Translated by Richard Howard. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977. (Woolrich is discussed in Chapter 3, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," and in Chapter 6, "Introduction to Verisimilitude.")

uska, Jon. *The Detective in Hollywood*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976. (Chapter Ten deals with *film noir*.)

uska, Jon. *Dark Cinema: American Film Noir in Cultural Perspective*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984. (Includes extensive and provocative treatment of Woolrich.)

Veales, Gerald. *Odets the Playwright*. London and New York: Methuen, 1985. (In this revised version of his 1971 study *Clifford Odets, Playwright*, Weales comments briefly on Odets' screenplay for the Woolrich-based *Deadline at Dawn*.)

Vood, Robin. *Hitchcock's Films*. Third edition. New York: A.S. Barnes, 1977. (Includes an interesting discussion of the Woolrich-based *Rear Window*.)

II. PERIODICAL ARTICLES

vallone, Michael. "Lonely Are the Great." *The Third Degree*, November 1968, pp. 2–4. (A brief tribute to Woolrich on the occasion of his death, reprinted under the title "Cornell Woolrich: In Commemoration" as an afterword to Ace Books' 1969 paperback edition of Woolrich's *The Black Angel*.)

Barbato, Joseph. "The Unknown Master of Mystery." (Amtrak) *Express*, March 1983, pp. 26 ff. (Brief survey of Woolrich's life and world.)

Bassett, Mark T. "Cornell Woolrich: Dance and the Detective." *Journal of Popular Literature*, III:1, Spring-Summer 1987, pp. 22–34. (An essay on dance motifs in Woolrich's novels and stories.)

Connor, Edward. "Cornell Woolrich on the Screen." *Screen Facts*, #5 (1963), pp. 36–46. (The first article on the movies adapted from Woolrich's fiction.)

Fisher, Steve. "Cornell Woolrich: 'I Had Nobody.'" *The Armchair Detective*, III:3, April 1970, pp. 164–65. (Reminiscences of Woolrich by a fellow pulp alumnus of the thirties.)

Flinn, Tom. "Three Faces of Film Noir." *The Velvet Light Trap*, #5 (1971), pp. 11–16. Reprinted in *Kings of the Bs*, ed. Todd McCarthy & Charles Flynn. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975. (Includes a discussion of the Woolrich-based *Phantom Lady*.)

Fox, Terry Curtis. "City Knights." *Film Comment*, XX:5, October-November 1984, pp. 30–49. (A lengthy discussion of *film noir* and its literary roots, including an entry on Woolrich by Jonathan Rosenbaum, listed below.)

Goulart, Ron. "The Ghost of Cornell Woolrich." *Twilight Zone*, IV:5, December 1984, pp. 16 ff. (Memoir of the author's acquaintanceship with Woolrich.)

Lacassin, Francis. "Cornell Woolrich: Psychologist, Poet, Painter, Moralist." Translated by Mark T. Bassett. *Clues*, XIII:2, Fall-Winter 1987, pp. 41–78. (Translation of the Woolrich chapter from Lacassin's 1974 *Mythologie du roman policier*.)

Lachman, Marvin. "The Music of Cornell Woolrich." *Just in Crime*, #1 (1981), pp. 2–3. (A listing of more than thirty music references in Woolrich's fiction.)

Milne, Tom. "The 1,000 Eyes of Cornell Woolrich." *British Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1978, p. 108. (A brief discussion of Woolrich and *film noir*.)

Palmer, Jerry. "Vertiginous Kitsch." *The Literary Review*, October 1985, pp. 44–45. (Critical discussion of Woolrich as a writer of *noir*.)

Penzler, Otto. "Collecting Mystery Fiction: Cornell Woolrich." *The Armchair Detective*, XIX:4, Fall 1986, pp. 388–95; XX:1, Winter 1987, pp. 34–38; XX:2, Spring 1987, pp. 152–59. (Three-part series on Woolrich's work from the point of view of the bibliographer, book collector and book dealer.)

Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Black Window: Cornell Woolrich." *Film Comment*, XX:5, October-November 1984, pp. 36–38. (Brief essay on Woolrich's contributions to *film noir*.)

Sandoe, James. "Dagger of the Mind." *Poetry*, LXVIII:3, June 1946, pp. 146–63. Reprinted in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1946. (The first sustained discussion of *noir* literature, including the novels of Woolrich.)

Santesson, Hans Stefan. "Cornell Woolrich." *The Third Degree*, November 1968, pp. 1–2. (Brief commemoration of Woolrich's life and work by one of his editors.)

Thailing, William. "Immortals Do Die: Cornell Woolrich (1903–1968): A Memoriam." *The Armchair Detective*, II:3, April 1969, pp. 161–62. (A tribute to Woolrich by one of his staunchest admirers and collectors.)

Truffaut, François. "Pulp Action: Dossier William Irish." Translated by Maxim Jakubowski. *Time Out*, June 17-23, 1983, pp. 13–14. (Brief discussion of Woolrich by the director of the Woolrich-based films *The Bride Wore Black* and *Mississippi Mermaid*.)

III. NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Blades, John. "A Nightmarish Legacy from a Master of Pulp." *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1987. (Column on the posthumously published Woolrich novel *Into the Night*.)

ıamplin, Charles. "Dark Fiction by an Invisible Author." *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, January 2, 1983. (Discussion of Woolrich's major novels in connection with their republication in paperback by Ballantine Books.)

rinklaw, Don. "Haunted Heroes, Brides in Black." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, March 24, 1983. (A similar survey in connection with the Ballantine reprint series.)

Iorrison, Bill. "Two Masters of the Dark." *Charlotte (N.C.) News-Observer*, January 7-13, 1983. (A column on the linkage between the fiction of Woolrich and the films of Alfred Hitchcock.)

obinson, David. "Half a Century's Inspiration." *The Times* (London), July 22, 1986. (Report on the 1986 International Mystery Film Festival, which was largely devoted to Woolrich and the movies adapted from his work.)

troby, W.C. "Woolrich's Art of Darkness Winning Renewed Appreciation." *Asbury Park* (N.J.) *Press*, September 27, 1987. (An account of the writing and posthumous publication of Woolrich's *Into the Night*.)

Jnsigned. "The Shattered Romance of a Gifted Author and a Millionaire's Daughter." *Cleveland* (Ohio) *Plain Dealer*, July 9, 1933. (Full of errors but notable as the only sustained contemporaneous account of the breakup of Woolrich's marriage to Gloria Blackton.)

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